VULTURES OF THE DARK

RICHARD E. ENRIGHT

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City.

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VULTURES OF THE DARK

BY

RICHARD E. ENRIGHT

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VULTURES OF THE DARK

CHAPTER I

KING TUT AND HIS DEVOTEES

MANHATTAN was dormant. It slept or sought refuge in water-tight compartments, whether single rooms, spacious suites, or private mansions; for the early autumn evening had been bleak and drear enough before the needle-pointed downpour of sheeted rain borrowed more fury from cutting blasts of a northeast wind.

Fifth Avenue stretched its lancelike length in mirrored sheen from Washington Square to One Hundred and Tenth Street. Its clustered lights penciled their unhindered reflection from curb to curb. It was bald and bare, save now and again for some infrequent, buzzing, adventurous auto or vagrant nighthawk taxicab.

Patrolman Sanders, working out of the East Sixty-Seventh Street station house, braced himself against the gusts that slithered through a cross street, and paused, for his scheduled 10.45 P. M. ring at the police box. His key whisked back the bolt, his hand lifted the receiver to his ear. Simultaneously a bulb on the station house switchboard leaped from inertia into flaming brilliance. There was a click as the plug blocks away joined his voice to the ear of the lieutenant on the board.

"Sanders! Everything O. K.," said he.

"O. K., Sanders!" answered the lieutenant, glancing at the clock face staring at him from the opposite station wall and noting the time of the call on the sheet.

Other restless, importuning bulbs jetted their diminutive semaphores into the lieutenant's eyes, each personifying another uniformed or plainclothes officer elsewhere, to whom inclemency was an incident, and with whom police duty was paramount.

So fast they leaped to life and then died after reports and responses that the lieutenant never heard the click of Sanders replacing his receiver. He relocked the box, then rounded the corner into Fifth Avenue on the eastern side, testing doors, peering into areaways with now and again a gleam from his torch, all that assurance might be doubly sure lest some bird of prey find crevice or cranny into which to insert the thin, fine wedge of an incipient felony.

Midway of the block Sanders paused.

He was opposite the mansion of James Murdock, and the lilt of the melody that filtered from it gave a tang to his disciplined pulses, a new sparkle to his alert eye, while the babel of sound within told him that a hilarious party was in progress. Sanders knew that tune. It bubbled spontaneously to his puckered lips.

James Murdock's home, like its owner, standing unmoved to any storm that blew, housed a novel and hilarious party given by his only child—a motherless girl named Audrey. Murdock was of the type of business men to whom New York is a Mecca on the ceaseless pilgrimage in quest of wealth. His quest had been crowned with a success so huge that it almost seemed that he had uncovered the fabled pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

Audrey was a type, as well, although quite opposite to her bland, inscrutable, acquisitive father. She was very young, barely past the age where "the brook and

river meet." She was delightfully pretty, undisciplined, capricious, enticing, irresponsible.

The fragment of melody which had floated out to the ears of Sanders was only a straw from the rollicking music of an Ethiopian "jazz orchestra," and the orchestra was only an echo in the evening's carefree chorus.

Audrey's party was a modernized version of a Bacchanalian revel with a pseudo-Egyptian setting. The large and ornate lower floor was given up to it. At the front end of the house was a stretch of sand with a canvas pyramid and a papier-maché sphinx. Clusters of concealed lights gave the desert glare. A mock river held a copy of Cleopatra's barge at one side, and Audrey herself was dressed to represent the historic queen.

The idea was Freddy Carrington's. Freddy was a "society sap" with nothing to do but imagine something different from what had gone before and to participate in it. Solomon, in all his wisdom, would never have conceived of such an idea as had burst from Freddy's maple sirup brain under the stimulus of divers and assorted cocktails.

Audrey's guests and herself were now standing in front of the pyramid, surrounded by Egyptian ballet dancers who might have been borrowed from the "Red Mill" in Paris, waiting the opening of "King Tut's Tomb."

Harry Gregory, another dapper young man, but no fool, since he was in business with Audrey's father, and his junior partner, was cast in the rôle of a celebrated British explorer; while Edithe Winthrop, a wealthy young society widow with nothing to do but spend the money of her deceased husband, had leaped from a Greek legend, clad as "Aphrodite, rising from the waves."

While the Ethiopian orchestra glided into a furor of barbaric rhythm Gregory began his excavation of the

crypt containing the long demised scion of the ancient Pharaohs by lifting a flap to the pyramid's side. A silence fell on the revelers as he said: "I'm about to open King Tut-ank-Amen's tomb, ladies and gentlemen."

He dragged out a huge coffin on rubber tires. Lying on its lid with grotesque, spadelike whiskers and well chiseled curls of hair was Freddy Carrington. He was King Tut to-night, also the amateur champion bartender of all Greater New York.

The ballet dancers prostrated themselves with low moans at the sacrilege. A big green beetle on a concealed spring jumped up and tweaked Gregory's nose so naturally that he leaped backward in genuine and ridiculous dismay. Audrey, Edithe, and the throng of guests and performers burst into laughter. This was the master touch from Freddy's sirupy brain, for he disliked Gregory intensely and was correspondingly fond of Mrs. Winthrop, who in turn was obviously enamored of Murdock's young partner.

Then Freddy rose slowly from his recumbent position, looked around with a mock serious air, and waited for Gregory to speak his line.

"Oh, king, live forever!" exclaimed Gregory.

The entire throng echoed the salutation with genuflections.

"How can a fellow live forever when he can't get any sleep?" hiccuped Freddy. "Who dares disturb the sacred mummy of ancient Egypt's finest wine cellar? Tut! Tut-tut! Tut-tut—tut-tut, tutty-tutty-tut!"

Freddy was just unsteady enough to stutter magnificently.

This was Audrey's cue.

"Oh, most puissant of Pharaohs," came her clear voice,

"tell us, is the royal treasure as yet unprofaned by marauders' hands?"

"Do you think I'd take a chance with it in a hot climate and eighteen amendments running wild, without having it buried with me?" impishly retorted the young clown. "The line forms at the left, ladies and gentlemen!"

Saying which Freddy leaped nimbly from his bier and dextrously unfolded his funeral couch. It operated like a davenport, but became a bar instead of a bed. It held assorted bottles, implements, accessories, and even cracked ice. Freddy had already filled two enormous cocktail shakers, and these he rattled like an end man's bones in a minstrel show, refilling them, after pouring, from the contents of his recent coffin, keeping time to the uproarious strains of jazz.

CHAPTER II

FATHER AND DAUGHTER

AS the great room again pulsated to the music of the orchestra and King Tut's devotees surrendered themselves to this added artifice of enchantment, Audrey Murdock likewise heard from afar the wild, luring strains from the pipes of deathless Pan, who always follows in the train of Bacchus. She seized the nearest male to her as a new and even more lilting "jazz" was droned by the orchestra. He happened to be Harry Gregory. Gregory usually saw to that, when Audrey was about. The girl's eyes were half closed and she did not even know with whom she was dancing.

Her provocative lips parted in an enchanted smile, her head was thrown back in rapture. Gregory's face masked his real thoughts, although he looked down into her own with the brooding contemplative eyes of a viper which has charmed a bird in its own nest.

King Tut and Aphrodite came gliding past. Edithe Winthrop's eyes flashed greener than the sheen of the mock river at the sight of Audrey in Gregory's embrace. She hated Audrey venomously because of Gregory's infatuation for the girl and his cynical disregard for her own ill-concealed infatuation for him.

Edithe found Freddy Carrington's fifteenth protestation that he loved her and his fifteenth proposal of marriage more bitter than the fabled waters of Lethe. She was like a half blind snake ready to shed its skin and more ready to sheathe its fangs in another's. She would have liked to poniard Audrey between the gleaming shoulders, but her semi-inebriated escort, although unconscious of her madness, swept her out of range.

"Edithe, I love you better zhan anyshing else in the world!" said he.

"Freddy, you're drunk!" said she coldly.

"I know it. There's no nectar ever bottled that can intocshicate a man like your eyes, your lips, your—well, I'm drunk, but the liquor didn't do it all! I've been on a worse bender ever since I firsht saw you," he protested.

"Why don't you make love to Audrey? She looks ready for anything, drunk or sober," sneered Edithe.

"I only wisht you looked that way," said the maudlin one. "I don't fawncy Audrey. Good little pal and all that, you know." A cunning thought insinuated itself into his child's size brain. "I think Gregory's got a crush on Audrey, and I guess she feels that way about him. Not half bad. Marry fazher's partner, mebbe! Might keep the fortune in the family—eh, wot?"

James Murdock was not in the party nor of it, although he was in the house. He was in his library on the floor above, scanning papers that related to his silk business.

The silk market had fluctuated violently during the world war when prices were at the peak; it had fallen down the precipice of deflation after the armistice and the sudden shortage of demand; it just had seen new altitudes following the news of the disaster in Japan.

Murdock was worried. He was a large, hearty man with a cryptic, sententious manner. His face luckily never told stories. No one but he knew the crisis in his affairs. He never confided in Audrey. She was far too young for one thing; for another she had been brought up in a luxury befitting a man of Murdock's capacity, vision, and relentless purpose. Murdock used men and circumstances as the exigency of business demanded. He molded them to his will. He knew no scruples—in business. It was otherwise with Audrey. His cold and callous nature was curiously contradictory where his only daughter was concerned. He was devoutly at her service at all times.

To-night her father was in no mood for the unrestrained gayety that Audrey's party entailed, although she wanted him to share in it. She had pointed out, with a pretty *moue,* that he was a "tired business man." Murdock was not tired. He was in straits. The silk market had him staggering, despite a series of adroit manipulations of a very questionable character which had heretofore kept him up.

It was a part of his life, this ostentation, and the one redeeming trait of an otherwise hardened character was his boundless love for and his pride in his daughter and his unwillingness to forego any expedient that might stave off a disaster that loomed unpleasantly near.

His personal fortune was the hazard of his conjectures.

The disaster in Japan had hit him hard. He had made commitments calling for the delivery of many bales of "Heir Apparent" white silk, a product fabricated only in far-off Nippon and shipped in bales to America.

Heir Apparent had shot up to ten dollars a pound more than he had sold it for. He had "gone short," relying on conditions in the trade. The disaster in Japan would ruin him unless he could get that silk, and he knew it.

That was not the worst of it. His business methods were as subtle, as devious, and as profoundly mysterious as his cryptic countenance. There were incidents in his daring, spectacular operations and in his successful career which would not brook investigation. Once allow a suit to be started for the nondelivery of that Heir Apparent brand, to be followed, more than likely, by an attachment against his bank account—for his was a corporation foreign to New York State and therefore subject to attachment for slight reason—and the "fat would be in the fire" with a vengeance.

He picked up a letter from the firm to which the sale had been made. It was courteous in tenor, yet he sensed its peremptory character. Murdock was shewd. He played a lone hand in the silk trade.

If he went into the open market and tried to buy silk enough to fill that order, even at the tremendous monetary loss he stood to face, he would not procure more than a few bales; he would, instead, run the price up higher by frantic bidding for it and thus cause his own downfall.

He read the letter over again. Next he perused the carbon copy of his reply dictated at the office that afternoon:

> Owing to the recent disaster in Japan, shipment of Heir Apparent brand has been unavoidably delayed. It

should arrive, however, in ample time to meet your needs, since it left our warehouse in Tokyo before the earthquake. Our advices are that shipment is en route.

Behind those words lay the acumen that had made of James Murdock an outstanding figure in America's greatest city; that had given him unlimited prestige, abundant banking credit; that had made him envied and feared by more conservative competitors. He plunged. He won.

The boisterous sounds floating up from below reminded him that he must talk with Harry Gregory before he left the house. Gregory was reliable. If he drank he did not drink too much to keep his head; but this seemed to be a wild party, even for Audrey, so her father determined to summon Gregory at once, before it got wilder.

Accordingly he rose and walked out of his library, through the hall, and descended to the balcony overlooking the improvised scene from Egypt, scanning the the costumed guests below for sign of his partner.

It was just then that Gregory was whispering to Audrey:

"Cleopatra, may I be your Marc Antony? There's nothing in the world I'd rather be, you know!"

The spoken word broke the spell that had gripped the girl. She opened her eyes wide. Through her half hypnotized brain shot a sudden qualm. Gregory's smooth, insinuating phrase carried a suggestion that was quite foreign to his usual polished deference, a leer was scintillating in his too ardent eyes.

Audrey, despite all her caprices, was no Cyprian. She slipped from his embrace with a lithe, elusive movement for which he was quite unprepared. Also she possessed by inheritance her father's aplomb and shrewdness, welded to the intuition of her sex. So she merely laughed.

"You can't be a Marc Antony while you're wearing that Lord Carnarvon costume. You should have thought of that before!"

Then she glimpsed her father on the balcony and bounded up the steps toward him, for his drawn countenance smote her with a reproach too deep for frivolity.

CHAPTER III

"MURDOCK—YOU'RE THROUGH!"

HARRY GREGORY was not far behind Audrey. He did not at first see Murdock as Audrey sped upward; for Gregory believed he was really about to sip ambrosia from a rare chalice and did not propose to be balked by the mere flight of a girl with such provocative lips. When he did, he abruptly paused part way up the staircase.

Murdock ironed out his distrait face with his inflexible will as Audrey gave a little cry of joy on reaching him.

"Don't bother with an old fogey like me," he smilingly protested. "Go on with your party. I only want to tell Gregory I must see him on a little business matter before he leaves. Oh, here he comes now."

Audrey kissed him fondly. The party was all right, but her big, affectionate father was worth all the parties in the world, and she told him so, almost mutinously.

"Come down and join in, dad," she pleaded, grasping him by the hand. "There's oodles of nice people here, and Freddy Carrington is a champion mixer. Break away from business for a few hours. It will do you good."

"Seeing you happy does me more good than anything else would or could," he beamed. "My, my! What an

original idea! It reminds me of the first time I ever heard the 'Streets of Cairo' being played. That, my dear, was in Chicago, on the Midway Plaisance, at the World's Fair, long before you were born."

"Did you go in and look at it?" queried the girl.

"No. I only had money enough then to get into the grounds. But I heard the music from far-off Egypt while I looked at the Ferris wheel. I got my money's worth. I usually do. And to-night we've got it all right here in the house. Run along, Audrey. I want to speak to Gregory a minute. Your guests shouldn't miss their hostess."

As the girl left, Gregory came up and stood beside her father.

"Don't go off your chump with all this," said Murdock, waving his hand at the scene below. "Keep your head, my boy. I want to see you on an important matter—that shipment of Heir Apparent has to be made, you know. I will be in the library. Don't fail to come up."

"Leave it to me. I never lose my head. I'll be there," said the younger man with a confident smile. He hurried down again, seeking Audrey, to the intense disgust of Edithe Winthrop. Aphrodite had carefully deposited her King Tut against his own transformed coffin, where he was now mixing another cocktail for thirsty revelers and also to drown his own grief at the lady's rejection of his fifteenth proposal.

Aphrodite was most radiant as Gregory approached. But Gregory had no Greek compliance in his make-up. He kept on in search of Audrey; he found her; he playfully but determinedly carried her away from another dancer, a tall, swart faced young chap with legs like a "lounge lizard" and heels that were fully as musical as the orchestra.

Gregory, however, found Audrey cold. The chalice

had passed from his too eager quest. Audrey was still politely cordial, but the pipes of Pan had dimmed their alluring notes at sight of her father's face. Edithe Winthrop's tigerish eyes were on them, but their glare grew less. She sensed the situation, although she could not divine the cause of Audrey's more rational attitude. She even listened to Freddy hiccupping another proposal with a pleased smile as she watched the hostess finally leave Gregory.

By now Patrolman Sanders was swinging along the side street, and the Murdock mansion with its Fifth Avenue front had an "L" which abutted almost directly back of the patrolman's present tour of duty. Here Sanders met the first pedestrian in civilian clothes he had seen for hours. He was a solitary figure, his umbrella dripped tiny Niagaras, and his raincoat did not quite reach to the tops of his sodden shoes. Yet he made no move to obtain shelter, neither did he seem conscious of the weather.

Sanders came closer. The man's attitude was unusual for a chance wayfarer. As he caught sight of the gleaming eyes turned in his direction, the patrolman's vigilance relaxed in a pleased smile, and he saluted.

"Good evening, sergeant," said Sanders. "Aren't you a long way from Center Street?" [1]

Roger Warren punctiliously returned the salute.

"I'm on a roving commission," said he, "but I'm without a submarine. How's everything over at your house?"

"Everything O. K. We've been having it quiet. Rap wood."

Suiting action to the word, Patrolman Sanders tapped his locust club beneath his protective mantle in accord-

[1] Police Headquarters for Greater New York is down town on the street named.

ance with tradition. A quiet time generally precedes one of hectic activity—in police business.

Warren's head jerked sidewise. His quick eye glinted, then the lids narrowed as he focused his gaze across the street. Sanders, like a setter, also "pointed" in that direction but without shifting his feet. He saw what had caught Warren's attention.

A deeper shadow than that cast by adjoining buildings was sketched for an instant against an open rear window of the Murdock mansion. While they looked it slipped inside and the window descended so silently as not to be heard above the hiss of the rain.

Warren whispered: "Wait here. If I need you, come in. I'll go around the corner and inside."

He darted away to the main door. His ring was answered by the butler, unheard by the revelers. Warren flashed his "tin" and motioned for silence. He sprang up the hall stairs toward the "L" side of the house, taking them three at a time, leaving the butler uncertain whether to follow or not.

Then the butler decided that he would not. The chap might be an officer. The butler thought he was. He was not certain of it. Yet he was quite sure that whether he was or not, and whether his entrance was legal or the reverse, the chap was not the kind of a man to brook opposition or even officious meddling.

Besides, James Murdock was in his library; the man had gone that way, and he was not the first caller who had come unheralded, asked and answered no questions, and gone as mysteriously as he had come.

Seated again at his desk, Murdock was deep in thought. His plan was adroit, excellently conceived, and by a streak of good luck it was virtually above all semblance of guile. Therein lay his safety and the key to his success when in

a tight corner. He had been in tight corners before, although never one in which he moved quite so warily.

Fortunately, he had already received a shipment of silk from Japan which had been purchased before the disaster that horrified the world. The only fly in the amber was that the silk thus purchased and shipped entered and passed through customs, was not Heir Apparent.

Murdock hadn't a bolt of that renowned and superfine product. But he knew its size, its texture; he knew how vast a sum of money it represented within the confines of even one packing case; and he knew that not the purchasers to whom he had sold "short," nor the customs officials, nor the police officials of Greater New York, nor any other person, could say positively that he had no such silk in his warehouse at that very moment. No one knew but himself and Gregory. And he could rely on Gregory.

Therein was his financial salvation. He knew where sufficient of this silk could be had. He had just reached this conclusion when a voice broke the silence pronouncing his doom. It floated from behind the curtains of his library, the identical draperies which he faced. They shivered.

"Don't move. Don't make a sound. Murdock, you double-crossed me once; you tricked me. You played me for a pawn in a dirty game. But the dollars you took weighed enough to make it worth while, didn't they? You've enjoyed them, haven't you? Well, the pleasure has been all yours."

The speaker stepped into visibility. The muzzle of his weapon was a deadly, frowning, tiny circle. It seemed to expand before the eyes of the man at the desk with horrid necromancy. It grew larger and larger. Now it was large enough to engulf him. Murdock realized his

peril. In the glassy eyes of the intruder he recognized the cold, ferocious malice of a madman, although of a madman who has become so through long pondering on a great wrong and one whose very existence is staked on the sole thought of an adequate revenge. The thin, drawn visage of the man with the weapon twisted into the cruel smile that spoke months and years of waiting for this moment.

It didn't really matter how the fellow had entered; even if the burglar alarm was already rushing a police wagon to the scene brimming with bluecoats it would arrive too late.

The cruel smile deepened. The man with the gun found a pleasure in the stupefied eyes, the pallid face, and quivering nerves of his victim.

For this he had waited and was waiting as he said:

"Murdock—*you're through!*"

His arm crept slowly, serpentwise, forward and his finger quivered on the trigger. Through the mansion whose revelers below were still "King Tutting" across the floor in front of the canvas pyramid, rang the terrifying reverberation of a revolver shot, clear above the clangor of the Ethiopian orchestra.

CHAPTER IV

A DUEL AND A LIE

MURDOCK sagged forward on his desk. Yet to his amazement he felt no wound. He had not expected to see so much as a thin wisp of smoke from that pistol before his eyes should forever lose their power to see. But he had expected to feel the

momentary numbing shock of the bullet's entrance. He did not feel it and he did not know why he did not, except that he might be already dead.

If so, death was a curious thing, for he had not altered a whit from life—he could even feel the thumping of his heart against the edge of desk, hear the echo of the pistol shot.

But why should it echo in that confined space? He opened his eyes. His intended murderer had not fired—not, at least, at James Murdock.

Some one else had first fired at him. The intruder had fallen or had thrown himself behind a large chair. The shot that Murdock had thought was an echo was the first this maniac had fired, and he had fired at some one in the hall who had first fired at him. The maniac fired again.

The man in the hall took his time. He could not discern the human target behind the chair, but Murdock could, for the fellow's forehead was exposed and in direct line with his own eyes.

With the utmost calmness Murdock's hand strayed into the top right-hand drawer of his desk. He kept a pistol there, an automatic, equipped with a silencer. He had foreseen that some day he might have occasion to meet an emergency such as the present one; but the years had flitted by and to-night he had been caught really off his guard.

The pistol was there. Murdock found it beneath the sheets of confidential correspondence and beneath a sample of white silk with the words Heir Apparent stamped on the selvage.

The man behind the chair fired again at the man in the hall and the man in the hall fired in return just as Murdock raised his own weapon. Then came another shot from

the hall. Its reverberation silenced utterly the faint snap of the shot from Murdock—the shot from a hand that did not quiver, sighted by an eye that did not quail—the shot that crashed home in mid-center of the forehead of the man behind the chair.

Murdock thrust his own weapon into the drawer again, swept his papers over it, and closed and locked the drawer. Whatever smell of powder filled the room could be attributed to the two other weapons, one of which was forever silent, now—the one that fell to the rug from the hand of the dead man and as well the one that flashed into view at the library door in the hand of Roger Warren, the detective sergeant on the "roving commission" from Center Street.

At his heels was Patrolman Sanders. Before Sanders had entered the clang of his nightstick had reverberated on the pavement outside and officers in uniform from the adjoining posts were already at the door!

"Go downstairs, Sanders. Keep any one from coming up." Sanders disappeared at Warren's command.

The system of the New York police department was already functioning. It had, in fact, functioned in the first swift sidewise glance of Roger Warren at the throng of revelers below—a merely transient glance, yet one which photographed the scene and those few folk within range of his vision indelibly, as events afterward proved.

For Warren was a police officer most antithetical to the traditional "New York cop" of the "good old days," when a walrus mustache, an adipose body, a sodden face, and a political pull were deemed qualifications.

The first question Detective Sergeant Warren fired at James Murdock was:

"Do you know this man?"

"I never saw him in my life before," said Murdock, unhesitatingly.

"I never did, either, until I saw him coming in at a rear window," said Warren, "and the next thing I saw was his arm extending his weapon. I was running down the hall. Would have been here quicker, but I took the wrong turn. I fired when I saw that movement. If I hadn't fired, you would have been in his place."

"Beyond all doubt," assented Murdock heartily. "In fact, when you did fire, I thought he was firing at me. I thought I was gone. It was a close shave. He demanded money. I didn't have any here—nothing to speak of. I never carry much money on my person. Too great a risk."

"I nailed him for keeps with my third shot," said Warren. "He looked starved out, desperate enough for anything. Please wait here, Mr. Murdock. I've got to go downstairs a minute and tell Sanders what to do. Also telephone the Third Inspection District for superior officers. I'm Detective Sergeant Roger Warren, from Center Street—headquarters, you know. Just happened to be going past.

"Even a police officer cannot kill a burglar like this one in the line of duty without being subject to technical arrest himself. So, since I killed him, I'll have to notify the lieutenant at the East Sixty-Seventh Street station house."

"Well, sergeant, you may be sure that it will be only a technicality. I have a pistol—I guess it's at the office—and I have a permit for it, as you may see down town. But I owe my life to you. Will you please let my daughter come up? I know she'll be worried."

"As soon as my superiors arrive, not before," courteously returned Warren as he swung down the stairs to the huddled group of revelers below. There he found

Sanders on guard. Audrey frantically besought Warren's permission to go to her father.

"Not yet," said he. "Your father is unharmed. The only shots you heard were those I exchanged with a burglar. Who are all these people?"

"My guests! Oh, this is terrible!" Audrey stamped her foot.

"Officer Sanders will take the names and addresses of the guests. Then they may leave," said Warren, after one glance at the capricious girl. "There will be other police officers here presently. After they have gone upstairs, you may see your father."

"But I want to go now," insisted Audrey.

"The servants," said Warren, as if he had not heard her last remark, "must remain. The burglar entered an open window. That must be explained at the inquest."

Audrey recoiled. "The inquest?" she echoed.

"The burglar," said Warren in a low tone, "is dead!"

Sanders took the names, and the guests began to leave. The party which had begun in such unrestrained hilarity had been riddled by the shots that had echoed from the floor above.

Audrey was dazed and dubious. She disappeared into the room where the revel had been held while Warren remained with Sanders, signaling to the other patrolmen at the door to allow the visitors to depart after Sanders had noted their names and addresses.

Warren telephoned to the station house and briefly told what had happened. Then he returned to the library. Murdock still sat at his desk. He had not moved. But a surprise awaited the young detective. Audrey was also there and crying softly on her father's shoulder.

"She couldn't wait," her father explained, "so she came up the other stairway."

CHAPTER V

LOVE ME, LOVE MY DOG

WARREN nodded. He had read the girl at first sight. He saw her as she was, young, good to look upon, alluring, but willful, capricious, irresponsible. However, she was in her own home, and her disobedience of his orders had brought its own punishment at sight of the dead man on the floor. He had wished to spare her that as well as the knowledge that her father's life had been in direst peril until, at least, the corpse had been removed.

He glanced again at her. Murdock, intercepting the look, shrewdly deflected the circumstances to his own purpose. He had been thinking. He knew he had killed this man. He knew he had reason to kill him. But he had lied, and having lied, he must fortify the falsehood. So, he said:

"My daughter, Mr. Warren—well she's my daughter. A 'chip off the old block,' aren't you, Audrey, dear? Fond of her own way like her dad and not yet experienced enough to know when to obey orders."

Warren essayed a reassuring smile. It was counterfeit. He leaned against a corner of Murdock's desk as if in sudden weariness. His eyes were not unkindly as he gazed down at the girl, whose tear stained face was still hidden on her father's shoulder.

"Audrey, dear," continued her father, "this is Detective Sergeant Roger Warren, from police headquarters. He happened to be passing the house. He saw the burglar enter and followed him in. If he had

not, your old dad would have been dead in the burglar's place. By the way, Mr. Warren, I feel I must compliment you upon your marksmanship. What kind of a pistol do you use?"

"A standard police arm, Mr. Murdock, thirty-two caliber."

"An automatic?"

"No, a revolver."

Murdock nodded. He had carried his point. His own automatic was a thirty-two caliber. Therefore the police would not know he had killed the man instead of Warren.

Audrey slowly disengaged herself from her father's arms. She rose and came quickly around the corner of the desk toward Warren—tried to grasp Warren's hand. He winced. She looked her surprise. Then she glanced at her hand. It was moist and red.

"Oh, you're hurt!" She paled at sight of the smear on his raincoat, at the drip of blood from his right hand.

"Only a scratch. A police surgeon will be here, presently," he reassured her. "Mr. Murdock, may I trouble you for a drink of water?"

Murdock stepped into the hall and he encountered Gregory, who had also come furtively up the other stairway. The older man flashed his finger to his lips and beckoned to his partner.

Within the library Audrey insisted on Warren's removing his coat and helped him take it off. Between gratitude to him for saving her father's life and remorse at having disobeyed his instructions to remain downstairs, she was most solicitous.

Her hand darted out and seized on the first thing within view which would serve as a bandage. It was the bit of white silk which had remained on Murdock's desk, when he replaced pistol and papers in his locked drawer. Audrey deftly bandaged the wound. One of the burg-

lar's bullets had grazed the biceps of the upper right arm, just below the shoulder. She secured the bandage with pins taken from the knot of flowers in her corsage. For Warren, this was a harder ordeal than his duel with the dead man, although for far different reasons.

By this time they had forgotten the dead man. They had forgotten the incongruous manner in which they had been brought together. When Murdock hurried back with the glass of water they were standing and looking now at each other and now anywhere else. Warren thanked him and perfunctorily drank it. Murdock could not guess that the wounded officer had drained a more incredibly potent draft from the cup of the gods during his absence. He only knew that his secret was safe and he was glad that Audrey had been a factor in preserving it from discovery.

CHAPTER VI

SAVE ME, SAVE MY DOG

AS Warren donned his coat the little knot of superior officers arrived from the Third Inspection District Headquarters. Audrey left the library, but remained near at hand.

Inspector Montrose, Captain Marsh, and Police Surgeon Dell were the newcomers. Warren briefly told the circumstances and submitted to a technical arrest by Captain Marsh. He was then paroled by that officer on his own recognizance and told to report in court the following morning to be arraigned for homicide.

"Shall I examine your arm?" asked Surgeon Dell.

"Miss Murdock applied a first aid bandage, sir. If you wish—"

"I think I'll have a look at this fellow instead. Do you wish to be relieved from duty?"

"My tour expires at midnight, sir," said Warren. "It must be nearly that now. Afterward, if there is no objection, I think I'll go home."

"You may go," said Inspector Montrose, "but you had better wait for the first examination."

It was brief.

"The cause of the death seems to have been a gunshot wound that entered about the center of the forehead and penetrated the brain," said Surgeon Dell. "How many times did you fire at him?"

"Three, sir. I think I hit him in the forehead with my last shot."

"You first shot—where did you aim?"

"At his right forearm, sir. His pistol was extended and he was about to fire."

Surgeon Dell lifted the arm.

"You hit him near the elbow, but the wound was not sufficient to prevent his returning your fire, I take it. How many times did he shoot at you?"

"Twice, sir. I was standing down the hall." Warren went to the door and pointed out the approximate spot.

Captain Marsh and Inspector Montrose walked down to the end of the passageway. Two bullets had embedded themselves in the wall. They removed them.

"Your second shot," continued Surgeon Dell, when the three had returned, "broke his upper right arm. That is why he did not fire a third time. I will direct the body to be removed."

Inspector Montrose turned to James Murdock.

"You have never seen this man before, I think you told Detective Warren?"

"Never," Murdock replied. "He appeared very suddenly. I had not the slightest idea of any criminal being in the house. He demanded money."

"Can you remember his exact words?" asked the inspector.

Murdock hesitated. Then: "I do not think that I can. You see, I was very much shocked at sight of an armed man. Then he fired at me, or I thought he did, at the time, but as I was unhurt—although I thought at first I was dead—I became very confused, mentally, I mean. I really thought I was dead, until I found my heart beating as usual."

The mixture of candor and deceit carried conviction to the minds of the listeners. Murdock's tone was beyond all suspicion.

Inspector Montrose nodded. "You had a close shave," said he. "Now we'll have a look at that back window."

The fastening had been broken. On the ground outside lay a small sectional jimmy. In the storm's uproar without and the sounds of revelry within it was easy to see why the forcing of the window had been unheard.

Contrary to usual precedent, the body of the dead man was taken down town. "This is a Fifth Avenue job," said Montrose curtly. "It must be carefully sifted. We may know who this man is after he is seen by the headquarters men or we may have to finger-print him to find out. Anyway, the post mortem and all inquiry will be held down town far better than in this district."

Warren was at the door and preparing to leave with the others when Audrey hurried down the stairs. In place of her evening gown she had on a street dress. The storm was still raging.

"You must let me drive you wherever you are going," said the girl.

"Oh, I'll be all right," he smiled, "but I'm very grateful for the offer."

"You are wounded," she replied.

"I am going directly home to my mother. I live with her."

"Then I'll drive you there. I've already ordered the car. I've told father I'd take you and he's entirely willing."

Warren resigned, not unwillingly. He was "off duty" for the time being and, what was more important, he was thus privileged to enjoy a few moments of society that was at least not displeasing. The car drew up at the front entrance and they drove away as the body of the dead man in the morgue wagon was taken down town from the rear of the mansion on the side street.

There had been a brief interval while the morgue wagon was being taken to the rear entrance. During that interval Gregory stole into the library, took one glance at the dead man, and then furtively slipped away.

Warren lived on the second floor of a modest little apartment on Eighty-Ninth Street just off Amsterdam Avenue. The ride seemed all too short to Audrey. She drove skillfully in her little coupé and asked only one question during the ride.

"Does your arm pain you?"

"Not much. It smarts, now and again. I'll put on another dressing after I get home."

Audrey parked the car at the curb and went in with Warren. Mrs. Warren was in the kitchen, but she came hurrying out when she heard the door open, and greeted her son with a fond kiss.

"What a terrible night. I've been so worried, Roger."

He returned her kiss. "I've been all right, mother. Am I late? This is Miss Audrey Murdock. She drove

me home from her house, where I was called to make an arrest of a burglar."

"Oh, that was kind of you." Mrs. Warren turned to the girl.

"No," said Audrey, as she shook hands; "the debt is all on our side. Mr. Warren saved my father from being killed by the burglar."

"A burglar! What is the world coming to?" said Mrs. Warren. "You'll have a cup of coffee with us, before you go back, of course. I'm making some for Roger in the kitchen."

She hurried out.

A low whine, a frenzied scratching on an adjoining door, startled the girl. It sounded like some one in great distress.

"Mercy!" Audrey leaped erect at the uncanny sound. "What's that?"

Roger Warren smiled.

"That's one of the best friends I have in the world. That's Patrol."

He rose and opened the door. An enormous police dog leaped through with a subdued yelp of delight, reared, and put both paws on the young detective's shoulders.

"Yes, this is Patrol," continued Warren, now somewhat more at ease. "I've trained him not to bark too loud in this apartment house. It disturbs the other tenants."

He turned to the dog, who had dropped to all fours and was regarding him intently.

"Patrol, go over to that young lady and shake hands with her. Say 'Good evening,' but don't say it too loud."

The dog trotted obediently to Audrey. She smiled at his willingness and his intelligence. He put up his paw. She took it in her gloved hand.

"Bow-wow-wow!" he barked faintly.

"I'm very glad to make your acquaintance, Patrol," said Audrey solemnly. He trotted back to Warren. "Isn't he wonderful?" she exclaimed, her eyes shining. "Why, he barks just as if he wore a mute in his throat, doesn't he?"

"I've trained him since he was a puppy," said Warren. "Now, Patrol, show Miss Murdock what you would do if a bad man was in that corner and I told you to watch him. I'll be the bad man."

He took his place in the designated corner. Patrol lay flat on the floor, extending his front paws with his head resting on them, and watched his master intently. Warren shuffled his feet. The dog's ears rose and he growled ever so faintly. Warren made a side-step. Patrol raised his head and growled a trifle louder. Warren made a sudden sidewise dart. Patrol rose to his full height on his hind legs as if on springs and his strong teeth seized Warren's collar from behind. He dropped to the ground, his weight carrying Warren down with him. Then he released his hold, growled menacingly, and returned to his former position, watching the prostrate man. Warren rose and retreated into the corner. So long as he stayed there Patrol did not move.

"That's all, Patrol, for now," said he.

Audrey clapped her hands. "Why, he understands every word you say to him," said she wonderingly, as Warren emerged from the corner and resumed his chair.

"He does more than that," said he, fondling the dog's head. "I sometimes think that he can read my mind. You see, a dog hasn't the power of speech like a human being. But he does have an intelligence. He has memory. He can retain ideas that he is taught, but he has to be taught. For instance, even if he had the skill and the hands, he could not invent such a thing as a lead

pencil; but if I told him that the lead pencil was mine, that I needed it, and that no one must take it, he would not allow any one to take it."

Audrey looked at the dog and then at his master. The evening's party had taken a most extraordinary turn. She could not help comparing Freddy Carrington with the young man opposite. There was a wide gulf between them, and Freddy, if he lived to be a hundred, would never be capable of feats that were commonplace to Roger Warren. He was not only an intrepid police officer, quick as a flash, risking his own life to save her father's—he was also a sagacious person, one who had evidently studied and thought much outside the nominal duties of his profession.

Audrey felt suddenly and unaccountably shy. If Warren sensed her embarrassment, he was too tactful to allow it to appear. He bridged the gap of her silence by continuing:

"What Patrol has just done is only a very small part of what he can do. You should see him outside this cramped little flat, for instance, out in the country. It is really shame to keep him shut up in such a narrow space, but I have no choice. Besides, you love me, don't you, Patrol?"

Patrol leaped from his reclining posture at the words and again caressed his master.

"Would you like him to have more freedom? If so, I think it might be arranged. I am sure that father would approve. We have a country place over on Long Island. If you wish, I will drive you and Patrol down and let you look at it. Then, if you felt it would be advantageous, he could stay there a few days with me—that is, if he would, of course. Do you think he would?"

It was Roger's turn to feel the same shyness which Audrey had felt. Her motive was unfeigned—that he

quite understood. She was thinking only of the dog's need which he had himself voiced, but Roger was thinking of the possible implications which her offer carried.

He was, first and foremost, a police officer. His duty had brought him into her life. His duty was continuous, and aside from whatever this evening developed, continued friendship with Audrey Murdock had no place in the line of police duty. Yet he could feel himself strongly attracted to her. He had felt it from the first instant her hand had touched his arm when she was dressing his wound. He admired her for her youth, her beauty, in spite of her willful and capricious disregard of his instructions at her home following his duel with the burglar; perhaps because she had disregarded him.

Warren's hand dropped to the dog's head.

"Patrol, did you hear what Miss Murdock has just said? Kind of her, old chap, isn't it? How would you like to go down in the country for a few days?"

"Of course," said the girl, "I—that is, we—I mean father and I—shall also expect you to come and visit him whenever you can."

"We understand, don't we, Patrol?" Roger Warren looked at the dog.

"Well, Patrol, what do you say, old fellow?"

"Bow-wow-wow!" barked the dog. Then he arose, walked deliberately over to the girl, laid his long, keen muzzle in her lap, and looked up into her eyes.

"He—says—yes!" managed Warren.

His mother entered.

"I guess you thought I'd never have that coffee ready," said she. "The first batch boiled over while I was in here, and I knew it would be bitter. Will you please come this way, Miss Murdock?"

"You are very kind, Mrs. Warren, but I really feel that I ought to hurry back home. Father will be wonder-

ing what has become of me. I told him I would be right back after I had driven your son home. I know I'd like the coffee, but it's late.

"Your son has promised to let me take Patrol down to our country home for a visit," she continued, and turned towards the door.

"I will see you to your machine," said Roger.

CHAPTER VII

THE SINS OF THE FATHERS

WHEN every one had gone and the excited servants had retired to the basement to gossip among themselves over the tragedy and the party, Gregory again reëntered the library. He found Murdock sitting at his desk.

"Sit down a minute, Harry. Be with you presently."

Gregory complied.

"Where's Audrey?" he asked. "I have not seen her since the blow-off."

Murdock told him. Gregory frowned. His partner did not see the black scowl that swept over the younger man's face. He was busy unlocking the top drawer of his desk. There was still one gap in the links of his otherwise splendid alibi and Murdock was not of a temperament to permit any gap to remain unclosed when he had an opportunity of closing it.

The opportunity he needed was at his hand. He removed the papers from the drawer and laid them on the desk. Then he brought out the automatic pistol, with the silencer attached to its muzzle. Beyond and in the rear of the drawer he picked a container holding several clips of cartridges.

Murdock unscrewed the silencer and carefully wiped the barrel of the pistol so that no trace of a discharge would remain. When the barrel was polished bright again he ejected the empty cartridge and replaced it with a loaded one. He did not replace the silencer. He was too clever for that. This and the soiled handkerchief he put in his hip pocket. He replaced the pistol in the drawer, piled his papers on it, and then relocked it, all with elaborate care.

During the operation Murdock did not speak at all. Nor did Gregory until he had finished. The younger man rose, tiptoed to the library door, peered down the hall to make sure no one was about, then returned to the desk.

"So it was you and not that plainclothes cop that killed—"

Murdock raised an imperative palm.

"No names," said he sternly. "Yes, I killed him. What else could I do? The cop might not have killed him. He might have arrested him if I had not killed him. Besides, he was trying to kill me, wasn't he? Otherwise the cop wouldn't have shot at him first. Then he fired twice at the cop. I was defending the cop's life as well as my own, wasn't I? The cop thinks he killed him. Let him think so. What difference does it make? If I hadn't killed him, he might have killed the cop—and then killed me."

Gregory shuddered. "I don't like cops," said he with cynical frankness. "But it seems they are useful sometimes—like any other sort of insect."

Murdock spread his hands on his desk and regarded them with a morose thoughtfulness, closing and opening them, finally clenching his fists as if he were crushing something.

He turned to his partner with a wry smile.

"I guess I'm getting old, Gregory."

He remained silent and thoughtful for another short space. Then he drew out his watch. "Let's get back to business by first comparing time," said he.

Gregory glanced at his own timepiece. The two agreed.

"We must make delivery of that shipment of Heir Apparent," said Murdock. "Here is what I wrote them to-day. They will reply to-morrow or next day at the latest." He looked at the younger man with an unfeigned smile. "That was what I wanted to see you about when I came to the party. You had left the office to-day before I received this letter and before I dictated this reply."

Gregory read the two communications with care. He nodded.

"You understand?" asked Murdock.

"Perfectly," said Gregory. "The shipment must be made and delivery receipted for, of course. What else? The shipment will be made. There is nothing else to do."

'That's the talk!" said Murdock heartily. "Well, I guess that's all, Gregory, all for to-night, anyway. Audrey will be back presently. She should be back by now. I don't want to hurry you, but business is business."

Gergory extended his hand. Murdock rose from his chair and took it. They looked into each other's eyes and smiled. They were both business men and inured to meeting whatever emergencies the silk market created.

Murdock sat on his desk and heard the departing snuffle of Gregory's machine. He was still immersed in thought and making calculations when Audrey returned.

She was in a rare mood. Exultation was uppermost until she saw the light in her father's library. Then she wondered if he had been waiting her return, if

he was anxious because of her prolonged absence.

She tiptoed softly upstairs and peered into the room.

"Why, father!" exclaimed the girl. "What in the world is the reason you insist on working so hard? It's time that you were in bed and asleep!"

He looked up in surprise, a smile replacing the haggard lines on his hard face. Whatever else he might be, James Murdock had at least the redeeming trait of profound, whole-souled parental affection. This love gleamed in his face as he smiled at her.

"Shame on you!" she continued, playfully shaking a finger at him. "After all these years and years of work, you're still working. Why, daddy?"

"My dear," said he, "in business I've found that the man who sometimes works a little later the night before is often two jumps ahead of his business competitors the morning after. That's business, Audrey, keeping ahead of the other fellow. If you don't the other fellow gets ahead of you, and then you no longer lead; you follow. I've always led, my dear. I must still lead!"

Audrey thought of her party. The expense had been enormous. The end of it had been completely unforeseen. The very room in which she stood had staged a tragedy. A human life had been snuffed out—as suddenly as the lights in the roomful of revelers had been turned off to allow the effect of the Egyptian scene which Freddy Carrington had devised.

"Go to bed, my dear," said Murdock. "I'm almost finished. It will not be long before I follow you. Good-night!"

She came over to him, twined her arms around his neck, kissed him, and went to bed, but not to sleep. Her thoughts went back to her father, still in his library; to the gruesome spot on the floor where the ghastly wound of the dead man had stained the rug.

Why had that man come into the house? Why had her father been found in the library instead of at her party? Her father was wealthy; he had a young business associate upon whom he placed many of his business details, in whom he relied with an implicit confidence. Why should he work all the time?

How came that man to enter her father's house? Surely not merely because he was a chance prowler, for Fifth Avenue is policed by private sentinels as well as by the police.

Audrey sat up in bed. If he was not a burglar, then he had some object in coming into her father's house under such extraordinary circumstances. That object could only be one that was stronger than love of his own freedom or care for his own life.

A step sounded in the hall. She did not hear it. Audrey Murdock was in another world. She did not hear the door open. She did not see her father's face as he peered in to ascertain if she had fallen asleep without putting out her light.

Audrey had reached the climax of her reasoning. She could think of only one reason why the man had come there at the risk of his own life—

"Why, Audrey! Why aren't you asleep?"

CHAPTER VIII

JUDGMENT IS RENDERED

AUDREY made an heroic effort to regain her composure, to be at ease, to appear the same careless, capricious, irresponsible young animal she had been when her party had begun. Her effort failed. She knew she could not succeed any more than

she could turn back the pages of time and become an infant in arms again.

"Why, daddy," said she; "I—I—well, I just couldn't go to sleep. I was thinking."

"Of what?" he asked, despite himself, although he dreaded her reply as much as he had dreaded the interval after the intruder had said *"You're through,"* and pushed his pistol a little nearer.

"I was thinking of that dead man, daddy. He didn't come here to steal anything. He came here to kill you."

It required all the self-command with which James Murdock had carefully trained his nerves for years to hold his poise at this unexpected answer. It was almost as bad as if he had been shot instead of shooting his victim.

But he merely said: "Why, Audrey, that is absurd! Of course, he did threaten to kill me; but he wanted money. He mentioned money. He said I had money and enjoyed it. I just remembered that when you spoke. I couldn't remember it when the police asked me about it. You see, I was quite unnerved for a bit. What on earth makes you think that he came here to kill me?"

"Oh, daddy, I only wish I merely thought it. But I don't just think it. I *know* it. And that's why I couldn't go to sleep."

"Nonsense," said he, almost gruffly. "It's your nerves, Audrey. It's been a trying evening. Brace up! Forget it. It's all over now. It can't be undone. Roger Warren saved my life. He'll tell you so himself. Didn't the chap get in as burglars always do? Didn't he jimmy open the rear window?"

"But why should he jimmy open a window when the house is full of people, daddy? That's just the point. No burglar would do that, would he?"

Her father's smile reassured her to some extent.

"How could the burglar know he was getting into a Fifth Avenue house?" he scoffed. "He pried open the window in the 'L' on the side street. It was an ideal night for a robbery. The patrolman didn't see him. It was Roger Warren that saw him, and he just happened to be passing the house. I told you that in the library, didn't I, and wasn't Warren there at the time?

"I think you need a sea voyage," continued Murdock affably. "I've been planning one for some time. One more whirl at business, and I'll be able to leave it all for a long time. Do you think you'd like to go on a voyage, my dear?"

"I'll dream on it, daddy," she equivocated.

"All right. Good-night, Audrey."

"Good-night, daddy—dear daddy!"

Murdock closed the door. Outside he almost stumbled, and brushed his hand over his troubled eyes. Then he laughed softly but harshly.

"I'm getting like some old hag sitting at an apple stand crooning to herself," he thought. "Lucky for me that I kept my head when Audrey said that, for it was surely a facer."

He kept on to his own room, thinking of Gregory. He could rely on Gregory. The emergency the firm faced would be met. Thinking thus, James Murdock fell asleep.

Other men were not asleep. Inspector Montrose had gone down town to await the body of the man Roger Warren had said he had killed in Murdock's home during the duel. The body was then subjected to the second inspection. It was made at once, for in a city of five millions of people each new day may bring a new and more pressing police problem for solution, and the nights are no exception.

The three bullet wounds were probed and each bullet extracted. It was not necessary to do this before the technical charge of homicide was made against Warren, but it was expedient.

Aided by experts at headquarters, Surgeon Dell extracted the bullets from the corpse, and then prepared to take them to Inspector Montrose, who was closeted with a subordinate officer of the detective bureau. The acting commissioner of detectives had gone for the day, but his office was still open. It is almost never closed.

Inspector Montrose and Captain Marsh, on removing the two bullets from the wall, had found one still faintly smeared with blood. Both of these missiles were of thirty-eight caliber, and examination of the dead man's weapon disclosed that it was of similar caliber. So far the story told by Warren was confirmed in detail.

When Surgeon Dell took the three additional bullets to Inspector Montrose, each one being marked to show the part of the body from which it was taken, Montrose regarded the three bullets with a canny eye. They looked identical. Apparently they had the same length and the same diameter. Each was inclosed in a separate tissue and tin foil wrapping and each was numbered. He turned them over to another man in the department of investigation.

"Give me a report on those as soon as you can, will you?" he asked. "There was a killing up in the Third Inspection District to-night. I want all the facts."

The subordinate soon returned with a written report. Montrose read it and frowned.

"Thank you," said he. To himself he said: "Hell's bells! I'm going to have a chat with the commissioner of police about this! I'll put it up to him. It looked all right at the time, but—"

CHAPTER IX

NORTH RIVER'S CRY OF "HELP!"

ON leaving the Murdock mansion, despite the lateness of the hour, Harry Gregory drove directly to the Murdock Company's warehouse on the east side of New York City, where it faced a large pier. Business activity along the river front slackens with nightfall, but it never entirely dies out. New York City must be fed, clothed, housed and furnished with fuel, and every circuit of the hands around the dial of the clock becomes an automatic incentive to whatever exertion is needful in the endless service to humanity which goes by the name of "business."

Hooting tugs with their convoy of lighters or barges fill both rivers at intervals; long lines of steamships sometimes receive night cargoes in the last rush hour that they may steam to foreign ports with the "turn of the tide," for the channel down to the Narrows is tortuous and shallow for ships of deep draft.

Gregory's errand, however, was none of these. It was very brief. He had come merely to deliver directions to a foreman of the warehouse for shipment of the silk whose delivery must be made on schedule. Then Gregory took his leave and went to bed.

On the opposite side of the city where the Hudson wends its way to the sea, the river traffic is even more intense and ceaseless during the night than on the East River.

Numerous railways have their passenger and freight terminals across it. At least three of them now bring passengers directly into Manhattan by tunnel, but the

goods that come from near or far are still floated in barges or lighters, across the broad, serene bosom of what New York calls the "North River."

At three o'clock in the morning on the Hudson River side of the city a man stood scanning a piece of paper. It read:

3.00 A. M. Out.
3.10 A. M. On time.
3.30 A. M. Happy.
4.20 A. M. On the way.
4.40 A. M. O. K.
5.00 A. M. Good.

At sight of this brief code slip which he held in his hand, the man holding it transformed the words to read as follows:

3.00 A. M. Lighter leaves New York side of river.
3.10 A. M. Freight barge leaves Hoboken on regular schedule time.
3.30 A. M. Transfer silk from barge to lighter.
4.20 A. M. Transfer silk from lighter to truck at dock.
4.40 A. M. Truck arrives at warehouse.
5.00 A. M. Silk repacked and relabeled with name of consignee.

There was nothing whatever in that slip of paper which could have given rise to the slightest suspicion that would justify police action had it ever fallen into hands that would have led to a police scrutiny. Nor in the code translation, as given, and it is a correct translation in every way, was there any ground for police action.

What happened, however, the same night that the body of the burglar was brought from James Murdock's home to police headquarters, and very shortly after Inspector

Montrose had concluded that he must have a talk with the supreme head of the department, was this:

At 3 A. M., on the New York side of the North River, a lighter lay at a dock, with steam up, ready to cast off her lines. Before she did several men walked on board. The lighter left the dock at exactly 3 A. M., and steamed up the North River, toward Hoboken, where is located one of the transcontinental railway terminals.

On the New Jersey side of the same river, at the same hour and moment, a freight car float towed by a tug was just casting off from the dock when a man leaped on board the tug and made his way to the pilot house, unseen, where the captain of that craft was at the wheel.

Nosing out from shore, his eyes intent on traffic and blowing his own signals to insure a clear passage, the pilot captain was conscious of nothing else until he felt the cold muzzle of a pistol against the back of his neck.

"If you make a move I'll blow your head off!" grated a voice in his ear. "You ain't got a Chinaman's chance if you let go of them spokes, get me?"

"Y-y-yes!"

"Keep steerin' fer midstream."

The menaced man did as he was bid.

According to the code schedule, at exactly 3.10 A. M., in midstream, the man with the pistol ordered the captain to stop his tug. The engineer of the waiting lighter and her pilot deftly brought the two crafts together and made them fast. A hook from a derrick on the lighter was dropped to the float. A large box of merchandise was quickly raised and swung over to the lighter and down to the deck, where a still slightly larger box was waiting to receive it. The moment the slightly larger box swallowed the one filched from the lighter, the large box was promptly nailed shut. The sides of this larger box bore no stencil marks.

This operation was repeated several times. The value of the cargo thus transferred would have sufficed, if in cash, to have chartered at least four national banks. The entire operation did not exceed half an hour. Then the lighter cast off from the float and nosed down the river in a slight fog.

The man covering the captain in the pilot house directed him to pull toward the New Jersey shore again. At 4.20 A. M. the lighter had reached the New York side of the North River and was made fast to her pier. The cargo was swiftly transferred to a waiting truck, the truck rumbled up the pier among hundreds of others from similar piers, and it sped across the labyrinth of the city among tens of thousands of other vehicles.

At 4.20 A. M. it had arrived at a warehouse in a remote part of the city and was unloaded within that structure. No human eye followed it save those of the men engaged in the transaction. They were all picked men.

In the meantime, the desperado on the tug, still covering the pilot captain, had forced him to bring his vessel and its looted float close to the New Jersey shore, when, suddenly, from the murky end of a wharf, a small launch darted out and alongside the tug.

The pilot captain was saved the trouble of any conjecture as to whether this was a minor craft of the police patrol. He did not think at all. He had no time. As the launch darted alongside the captain went down, unconscious from a blow from a blackjack, delivered where it would be most effective, at the base of his brain. The man with the pistol pressed against the back of his victim's neck had delivered the blow with his free hand.

The captain fell to the floor; his assailant leaped to the deck of the tug and thence into the waiting launch. The tug was now without a pilot, careening this way and that, and the attached freight float was without power.

The launch was darting for the Manhattan side of the river.

Sensing something wrong, the engineer of the tug rushed on deck. His glance at the pilot house discerned no one at the wheel. The foaming wake of the departing launch caught his eye as he climbed upward to investigate.

He was just in time to help the captain to his feet. The dazed man promptly jerked his whistle rope, and the next instant the silent night was rent asunder by a police call for assistance.

It was a different sort of a signal and it was miles away from where Patrolman Sanders, alert to aid Detective Roger Warren, had signaled with his nightstick on the pavement of Fifth Avenue in the police precinct of the East Sixty-Seventh Street station house, but it was none the less a call for instant help and it would have instant answer.

CHAPTER X

A CLEW FROM THE UNKNOWN

STRIDENT, despairing, imperative as the tug whistle was, it was too late to stop the two men in the launch when the fast police boat Sivanoy responded to the call. Notwithstanding the speed of the Sivanoy's commander and the celerity with which news of the robbery was communicated by the pilot of the tug, the swift launch was already out of sight and was ensconced snugly at some pier—or under it—on the New York side, to baffle pursuit and avoid capture for the time being.

They were safely landed; their craft was moored; there was nothing whatever to connect these two particular

men with the midstream hold-up, when two Manhattan patrolmen, attracted by the sound of the tug's wild whistles, made their way from posts on West Street and down a pier to investigate. They saw these two men approaching. Simultaneously the two men saw them.

The fugitives from the launch immediately began to retrace their course; the two patrolmen, noting this, increased their speed; the fugitives simultaneously began a wild race in and out among the heaps of cargo with which the pier was piled high, now disappearing, now reappearing, but always making a direct line to where their craft was moored, successfuly avoiding identification.

They were cut off from land. They knew they were both guilty of a felony, since aiding the escape of one who has committed a felony puts the offender on a common footing, in law, with the actual perpetrator of the crime.

The point is stressed here because it was a factor in what afterward happened. The two reached the launch and they shot into midstream before the officers could reach the end of the pier. They headed obliquely down the North River—and it was then only that the powerful searchlight of the Sivanoy picked them out of the gloom as relentlessly as a man with a microscope identifies the germ of a dread malady in a mass of harmless material.

There was nothing to show that this launch was the launch that had taken the robber from the tugboat. The pilot captain of that craft had never seen the man who had put the pistol against his neck and who had afterward dealt him the cowardly blow; in fact, aside from the nature of this wound and the impossibility of his thus wounding himself, the entire story might well have been received with official incredulity, and they might have been justified in believing him an accomplice of the commander of the lighter which had carried away the valuable cargo.

Nor had the engineer of the tugboat seen the escaped thug. All he knew has already been told. Nevertheless, the Sivanoy's commander started in pursuit of the launch, for its speed considerably exceeded that of legitimate river traffic; and, moreover, it paid scant heed to signals to halt.

The Sivanoy rapidly overhauled the launch, and her identity was so well known to other harbor craft that passing ferryboats, tugs, lighters, scows, and watercraft of every kind, noting the chase, took good care to allow the police boat a clear right of way.

A pistol blurted an orange flash through the dawn murk that hung low over the river. A bullet whined past the lookout in the bow of the Sivanoy. If proof of guilty flight were lacking before, it was not lacking now. A volley from the pursuing officers and another random shot or two from the pursued and the chase was over. One of the launch's occupants dived for safety over the side. He had little stomach for gun play under such circumstances, for the so-called "gunman" of Gotham never gives his intended victim the remotest percentage of a chance for "an even break" if he can see to it that the advantage is all on his own side.

The other occupant of the launch was its pilot and engineer. He surrendered and was promptly handcuffed, while his compatriot in the adventure was incontinently fished from the river with a boathook. Neither of them had weapons. The river is deep—and handy. They were taken back to New York City and within the hour landed at police headquarters, where their finger-prints were taken. Those of the man killed in the Murdock mansion had also been taken hours before.

The dead man's prints had led to his prompt identification. He was Bernard Gusset, also known as "Satchel" Gusset, sobriquet given him by the underworld from the

fact that he had once participated in the robbery of a bank messenger, who carried a satchel containing money and bonds amounting to fifty thousand dollars.

When the finger-prints of the man who had dived into the river were taken, it was found that they were those of the accomplice of Satchel Gusset in the robbery which had occurred years before. His name was Harold Yates. Both men had been convicted and had served their sentences, Satchel receiving ten years and Yates five and a half.

The coincidence, while very curious, threw no immediate light on the killng of Gusset in the mansion of James Murdock. Nevertheless, it was the only clew available, and the police department, coördinated with minutest care in its endless war with criminals ranging from amateur shoplifters to murderers, "ran it out" at once and to the best of its ability.

The man with Yates when he was arrested, proved to be the owner of the launch. His name was Leonard Grove. Both he and Yates strenuously denied any connection with a "job" of any sort and at any time. Nor had Grove any police record at headquarters.

Both men accounted for their flight by saying they were going deep sea fishing and were anxious to "clear the Narrows" and get to open water shortly after daybreak.

Grove, in particular, vehemently protested that he had no idea that the Sivanoy was in pursuit of his craft; he denied shooting or hearing Yates fire; he said that the noise of his engine would drown any sound of a shot. This was half true and half untrue, but it was a bit of clever defense by avoidance, which, together with the failure of the tug captain to identify Yates, made a fatal hole in the police case against either captured man for the North River hold-up.

Nevertheless, both men went into the morning "line-up"

at headquarters, an ordeal that is dreaded by the most hardened criminal, but which a really innocent man can face without fear.

CHAPTER XI

SEEKING "THE MAN BEHIND"

THIS line-up is an evolution of metropolitan police business created by necessity. At nine thirty o'clock each morning all prisoners who are accused of felonies or who are under suspicion of having committed felonies, are placed one by one on a small platform. A strong light is focused on the prisoner. Confronting him and sometimes walking past him to get a better view are a few hundred men then on special detective detail at police headquarters. Their own prisoners, if any, are there; and, as well, the prisoners of all other arresting officers. Each detective is masked. This precaution enables him to inspect any prisoner without future risk of being identified and, perhaps, avoided or killed.

Yates was not told that his previous record was known after he was finger-printed; nor was he informed that his erstwhile comrade in another crime by violence had been killed the same night. All Yates knew when in the line-up was that Second Deputy Commissioner Roxey, of the detective bureau, and Inspector Harlan, from the criminal identification bureau, were near him. To Yates they were merely two officers of high rank—nothing more. He did not know their titles nor their respective departmental duties.

Yates was subjected to a prolonged, wordless scrutiny by every man present. Among them was Roger Warren,

masked like the rest. Warren did not know Yates. Then Inspector Harlan asked Yates:

"Were you ever arrested before?"

"Yes, sir."

"When, and where?"

"About twelve years ago. Your records will show."

"On what charge?"

"Robbing a bank messenger, complicity."

"Were you convicted?"

"Yes, sir."

"Serve a sentence?"

"Yes, sir. Five and a half years in State prison."

"Is that all?"

"Yes, sir."

"You were arrested last night?"

"I was."

"On suspicion of being connected with a silk robbery on the North River?"

"I don't know why I was arrested."

"You were told you were arrested for suspected felony?"

"I paid for the only felony I ever committed," replied Yates with astonishing nonchalance. "Are you trying to collect that debt all over again? If you've got anything on me but suspicions, take them to the grand jury and have me indicted."

No notice was taken of the prisoner's truculent attitude. The examination was continued, quietly but remorselessly.

"You said your sentence was for complicity in robbing a bank messenger?"

"Yes, sir."

"How many others were concerned in that robbery?"

"Only one man."

"Do you remember his name?"

"Yes, sir."

"Will you state it?"

"Bernard Gusset. They called him 'Satchel' Gusset up the river."

"How long did he get?"

"Ten years."

"Is he out?"

"I don't know. I got out three years and a half before he was due to get out. How should I know? You know I couldn't write a letter to him, for my writing was known at the prison."

"This affair last night—"

"Excuse me. I stand on my constitutional rights. I demand the right to consult a lawyer. I don't even know if I'm arrested legally."

"What do you mean by that last statement?"

"I mean this: I was going fishing with a friend. The tackle was in my boat. I had a legal right to go fishing. I had a legal right to use the boat. I was more than half-way across the North River, so far as I can remember, when somebody began shooting at me. I dove overboard. I had a little money. The river is full of yeggs. How could I know who was shooting at me? If I had waited for an explanation I might be floating out to sea with a softshell crab tied to each ear. That's all I'm going to say, except I demand to see my lawyer."

"Who is your lawyer?"

Yates gave the name of a man who frequently appeared in police courts. Sometimes the prisoners retained him, sometimes the penniless prisoners he defended preferred him and he took their cases without a fee—from them. So Yates was taken back to a cell.

The police knew from his defiant demeanor that Yates had been carefully coached; that "fall money" would be forthcoming for a vigorous defense in his behalf if any attempt were made to arraign him on the insufficient evi-

dence at hand; that bail was even then being arranged; they knew that Yates had carefully weighed the chances, pro and con, of his capture while in the nominally desperate but really innocuous business of holding up the pilot-captain; they knew that the inducement to him to take such chances must have far outweighed the remuneration of any honest calling; they knew that some lawyer would probably learn, through visiting other prisoners, that Yates had been arrested; that his own lawyer would call to verify the fact and demand to see the prisoner.

In brief, the police department was most acutely cognizant of every factor that lay behind the attitude of Yates; the department had every reason to believe that his arrest was that of the right man, but that somewhere, lurking safely among the five millions of Manhattan residents, was the man who would really profit by this latest gigantic robbery; that it was a hopeless task to try to get *the man behind* this and scores of other major felonies by examining Yates further; that the earmarks of each offense were so identically the same as the other as to point infallibly to a common origin.

While Roger Warren did not know Yates, he knew that Yates had been a former pal of the man he had killed the night before in James Murdock's home.

He heard the words "silk robbery" with a thrill. Not alone at the memory of the girl who had bound his arm the night before as well as mention of the word silk, but also at recollection of two faces which had been stamped upon his mind in his swift dash past the open door where the guests of Audrey Murdock were "King Tutting" while Warren was on his mission to prevent a cowardly and deliberate murder.

One of these faces was that of Harry Gregory. Warren wondered if, despite all elements of improbability, Gregory could possibly be the long sought "master mind"

whose handiwork covered the whole range of crime—looting of society women of gems worth hundreds of thousands of dollars, holdups of opulent clubs whose favorite diversion was poker, robbery and murder of bank messengers or employees intrusted with large pay rolls for big concerns, looting of lofts by "wall lizards," or of safes by "peter-men" whose uncanny skill with complicated lock mechanisms and burglar alarms proclaimed them experts in their line.

Warren hurried to the cell where Yates was being held for the usual forty-eight hours before arraignment. He replaced his mask.

"Come over here, Yates," said he.

The prisoner swaggered to the door.

"I think you're going out of here," said Warren candidly. "In fact, I don't see how they can hold you."

"Why tell me something I know already?"

"I didn't arrest you. I have no personal interest in seeing you held. I wanted to know a little more about this guy Gusset."

"I'm no stool pigeon," flashed Yates angrily.

"I wouldn't be here if I thought you were. I merely wanted to ask you something. This old job—that's done and paid for, isn't it? Just as you said. Well, Gusset was bumped off last night. He was half starved before he took an awful chance. You were both grabbed. You got away with a big wad. You didn't plan that job; you only helped Gusset. He got the jack. He went to jail. He was let out only a little while ago. He couldn't have had a dime. What became of all that jack?"

"I got mine. I told the court I got mine. My split was one grand. (Criminal argot for one thousand dollars.) Gusset got his. He got five grand. Like a fool, he paid a lot to a cheap shyster to try to squeeze him out.

I told him at the time he didn't have a chance to beat the case. I don't know who got the rest. You see, this wasn't our job. We was both just hired men. And if you ask me, my opinion is that the gink that hired us was a hired man. Get me?"

"I do. You couldn't prove that, of course?"

"No, I couldn't. I was hired. I was paid. I didn't have that bag I grabbed for ten minutes. I passed it on. I knew too much to try to lam with it. Why? Because I'd have been gunned my own self. The guy that got it from me was in the same fix. He had to take his cut and pass it on. Somebody that never showed got at least forty grand of the fifty that was in that bag. Five years and a half of that up-the-river stew was too much for one grand. I laid off. I paid, and I'm through. That's why I'm going outa here."

"I'll put in a word for you. It won't hurt you."

Warren left and went straight to the office of the inspector in charge of the detective bureau. The inspector was waiting for him to send him at once to the office of the commissioner of police.

The commissioner sat at his desk. Before him lay Warren's report of what had happened at the home of James Murdock the night before, and a confidential memorandum from Inspector Montrose of the Third District.

"Sit down, Warren," said the commissioner.

"Thank you, sir."

"Warren, I want to ask you a question. Can you believe this?"

He paused. Warren leaned forward and heard the words. They held for him an extraordinary significance.

"Nothing," said the man across the desk, "is too wonderful to be true?"

"Yes, sir," said Warren unhesitatingly, "I not only can. I do believe it."

He was thinking of Audrey Murdock, of his wound, of the bandage of silk she had placed upon his arm—and of the mysterious perverted genius he believed really responsible for many crimes. He did not know that he had not killed a man, at all, or that the man who had asked him that question already knew he had not killed Gusset. He did not know that Inspector Montrose, keen eyed as a lynx, had put into the commissioner's ear a word or two that was not in his own official report.

Nor did he know that he would go out from that room carrying with him the complete faith and confidence of the highest officials in the department for those reasons; that he had been picked from all other men to solve a problem that had appeared unsolvable.

He only knew the commissioner smiled genially, lighted a cigar, leaned back in his chair, and said:

"Now, tell me all about what happened last night in the Murdock house. Inspector Montrose has aroused my liveliest curiosity."

Warren told him.

CHAPTER XII

THE MAN WHO LIED

JUST before Warren's entrance, Inspector Montrose of the Third District had left the Police Commissioner's office, after a short conference.

That conference revolved about the killing of "Satchel" Gusset at the Murdock home. The portion referring to Warren began thus, with the inspector introducing the topic:

"Commissioner, one of your own men dropped into

my district last night and killed a man." Montrose detailed the circumstances. "What I want to know is this: Are the rest of your men two-gun men like this one?"

"Not that I know of, Inspector. I don't know that Warren is. What makes you think he's a two-gun man!"

"He said he killed this burglar. At the time I saw no reason to doubt his statement. But if he did kill him—well, have a look at this." He handed over the three bullets taken from the corpse, pointing out the one that had been taken from the forehead and then pointing to a report with the heading "Micrometer Examination."

The commissioner looked mildly perplexed. "One bullet is .320-caliber the other two .32-caliber," he read. "According to that Warren must have been shooting with two pistols at once or else——"

"He didn't kill Gusset, he only thought he did," dryly observed Inspector Montrose. "Next, if he didn't, who did? That isn't hard. The man who killed him lied to me. That man was James Murdock."

"You are sure?"

"I'll let you point out my error, Mr. Commissioner, if I am wrong. It is very simple. I asked Murdock to tell me what the dead man said when he came into Murdock's library and put the gun on him. Murdock couldn't remember, he said. He lied. He might forget his mother's name or his own. But half an hour after he escaped death at the hands of a man who gave him some alternative to death—assuming Gusset did—he would certainly remember those words above all others, especially after death missed him by a hair because Warren balked it."

"That is logical," said the commissioner. "But, suppose Gusset didn't offer him an alternative?"

"Then Gusset was there to kill him, regardless of money—which Murdock said he demanded, but couldn't

recall the words—or regardless of anything else. If that is so, and it must be so, then Murdock didn't want the police to know what the fellow said to him. It all adds up."

"You said nothing of this to Murdock?" asked the commissioner.

"No. This wasn't Tenth Avenue. It was Fifth Avenue. Warren told me, in Murdock's presence, that he had killed the man on the floor and showed how and why. His story was straight enough as far as his knowledge went. Besides, while I suspected Murdock of holding out on me, how could I prove it? I had nothing to show, then, that he had lied. But I felt that he had, and for that reason I ordered this corpse brought down town and the headquarters' experts to handle it. I didn't want any blunders."

"You were prudent, Inspector."

"Thank you. But I'm just getting warmed up. There was a big lush party on downstairs. Murdock has a very charming daughter. Patrolman Sanders told me, afterward, that Warren ran to the front of the house and tore upstairs, leaving him to watch the window where the burglar broke in. Sanders went in through the same window—Warren doesn't know that—to help protect Warren. Sanders ran upstairs, behind Gusset, to cut him off. The racket below was awful. Sanders saw no else in the back halls, not even a servant. They were all downstairs, guests and servants. Sanders came into the hall leading to the library from the rear, but some distance behind Warren, just as Warren fired the first shot and hit Gusset in the forearm. That's one of the 32-caliber bullets."

He paused. The commissioner nodded. "Go on, please."

"Gusset went down on the floor and instead of firing

at Murdock, at all, fired his first shot at Warren, missing Warren, nearly hitting Sanders at the far end of the hall. Sanders from there couldn't see Gusset and didn't dare fire anyway for fear of jeopardizing Warren, who didn't know Sanders was in the house, at all.

"That's that, except Sanders in his report at the station-house said he saw a bullet mark in the library wall just before Warren sent him downstairs to keep the guests from rushing upstairs. That's where Warren's third shot went, not in Gusset's head as he thought it did. I learned that this morning, but even Sanders doesn't know we took three bullets from Gusset's corpse. Now, I hope I've made it plain to you that until just before that shooting began Murdock was alone upstairs. So, who else could have shot at Gusset except Murdock, and with a pistol whose caliber isn't .32 but is calibrated in thousandths instead of hundredths, and hence is .320."

"Excellent reasoning, Inspector. Anything else?"

"Yes, sir. Sanders says that everyone else obeyed Warren's orders and stayed downstairs, while he took the names and addresses of the guests, waiting my arrival with Captain Marsh and Surgeon Dell, except this girl, Audrey Murdock. She slipped up the other stairs leading to the balcony from the room where the party was being held. Sanders didn't see her go up, but he did see her come down that way, after I arrived and went up the front main stairs."

"You think the girl was concerned in the shooting?"

"I never try to think unless there is some reason for thinking. No, I don't think she was. For Sanders saw no one else upstairs, as I've said. I mentioned it only because of the girl's subsequent behavior. I've raised five daughters of my own and I had to figure a lot over them. This girl, Audrey, insisted on driving Warren home, afterward. Gratitude, you'll say, for saving her father's

life; she also bandaged his arm, he got a scratch in the shoulder; Warren told Surgeon Dell that it was bandaged. Again, gratitude. Yes, of course. But I got a glimpse of that girl's face when she insisted on taking Warren home. She is young, impressionable. Warren is her hero. She went overboard. I hope he don't.

"I'm almost through. Here's one of those police hook-ups we can never foresee. There was a big silk job pulled off in North River last night. This Yates, Inspector Coghlan tells me, was a pal of this Gusset's that was killed in Murdock's house; both were sent up for a bank job about twelve years ago. I had Gusset identified by his old mugg and prints before they brought in Yates. If Gusset didn't go there to rob Murdock and did go there to kill him, what's the answer? We can't miss it. Either before Gusset went up the river or after he got out—and he's out less than four years—Murdock and Gusset must have had dealings, directly or indirectly.

"If they had dealings before Gusset went up, which seems most probable, Gusset brooded on revenge. I didn't go back to look for a .320 caliber gun at Murdock's house because a fellow as clever as he thinks he is would have got rid of it before I got back there. He has a permit to carry a pistol. I looked that up. But, in my judgment, that pistol is or will be to-day in one of his offices. It will show no evidence of a discharge. And there you are!"

"You've told Warren nothing of this?"

"No one but you, Mr. Commissioner. I've only told you what I know and not what I think I know."

"I'm enormously obliged, Inspector. I'll think over this. When you go down, would you mind telling the officer in charge of the detective bureau to send Warren to me when he comes in and if you can arrange with some magistrate in your jurisdiction, have him arraigned,

exonerated, discharged, later in the day and you and I will keep what we know under our own hats?"

CHAPTER XIII

CARTE BLANCHE. GET RESULTS

"YOU killed this chap in the line of duty?" asked the commissioner when Roger Warren had finished his study.

"Yes, Mr. Commissioner. I am sorry it fell out that way. I had no other choice. The man was about to kill Mr. Murdock when I fired first, as I said. Then he turned his gun on me."

"If you had not killed him and Mr. Murdock had a weapon handy, the result might have been the same."

"Mr. Murdock told me his pistol, for which he had a permit, was at his office. But, Mr. Commissioner, there's a curious angle to this. Gusset was a pal of Yates. I saw Yates in the line-up. I went to his cell."

Warren sketched the conversation with the former convict. The Commissioner nodded. "Inspector Montrose mentioned the hook-up of the two cases. That North River job was a big one. About $200,000 worth of a rare brand of Japanese silk was taken. The job was well-planned and well-executed."

"I've been thinking of that, Mr. Commissioner," said Warren. "I saw a man at Murdock's last night, two men. Both were guests. One is named Harry Gregory. I know nothing about him but what his face tells. It's a snaky face underneath. The other face I saw is that of a man who was once a member of the Brownie Joe gang. Do you remember them? They used to hang

out at the Old Mill, on West Forty-Second Street. They were a smooth bunch, wore full-dress, some of them, but a bad lot. One of the gang was a girl they called Nutsy Mary. She was a leather-lifter and used to pick up men on the street and fleece them. This other fellow I saw last night was Micky the Maggot, her brother. He was arrested often, but never convicted.

"I didn't get a look at either of them when I first went in. They were both dancing near the door of the room where the party was being held. I was on the jump, trying to get upstairs to head off Gusset who had gone in through the rear window—couldn't stop. Got there just as he was about to bump off Mr. Murdock. I saw Gregory afterward. He was still in the house, although the other guests had gone. I didn't see Micky. Now Murdock's in the silk business, I understand, and this Gregory works for him. I've been wondering—"

"About what?"

"It's just a wild shot at a lot of these big robberies, Mr. Commissioner. I've been wondering if this guy Gregory might not be the smart alec that's behind some of them. I can't be certain.

"Assuming Gregory is a crook," he went on, "and a guest, then there were two crooks among the guests. Murdock's in the silk business, the real estate business, the insurance business—and what not. Big man, mixed up in lots of things. He's got this crook working for him. What's to hinder the crook working with other crooks? Gusset was once a crook. He might have come there to rob Murdock. Or, he might have come there to kill Gregory and blundered into Murdock, don't you see?"

"Yes. Go on, Warren."

"If Gregory was a crook, and handling crooked silk

along with silk that was honestly bought and sold, then Gregory would have an alibi planned in advance. Why not last night at the party, at his boss's house?"

"I'm still listening," said the commissioner. "Wait a minute. Here's the report on that robbery in North River. Look at it."

Warren did and almost fell out of his chair. He looked up, his eyes shining.

"May I call up my mother, right from here?" he asked.

"Why?"

"Mr. Commissioner, this report says the silk taken was 'Heir Apparent' brand from Japan. Miss Murdock bandaged my arm in her father's library last night with a piece of wonderful silk, later when mother took off the bandage to give the arm a fresh dressing, I noticed the words 'Heir Apparent' on that bit of silk on the selvage. I wonder if Murdock's firm was robbed?"

"No, Warren. Another concern. The loss is irreparable. The silk factory was destroyed in the recent earthquake in Japan, the robbed firm says. It is most important that the loot be recovered. Call up your mother later. Now, you're sort of on the inside, with Mr. Murdock, I take it. Anyay, you saved his life. He seemed grateful, didn't he?"

"Yes, Mr. Commissioner. And his daughter, Audrey, charming girl but rather self-willed, she was grateful, too. Insisted on driving me home. Most unusual but I could not well get out of it. She met my mother and fell in love with my dog, Patrol. Wants to take him down in the country. There's really no objection. It will help the dog. City too confining."

"Good, Warren. Don't you see? You have a wedge in already. You can let Miss Murdock continue to cultivate the dog's acquaintance. You can get a line on

Gregory, or Micky the Maggot, or anyone else who may be mixed up in this affair. Gusset's breaking in there is a most unusual coincidence for mere chance, since he was once also a pal of Yates. We've got to 'spring' Yates. Nothing on him. Too bad. Now look at these cards."

The commissioner reached into a file and handed over a dozen index records of "big jobs." They embraced many crimes, jewel robberies of women of high social position; robbery and murder of bank messengers and pay-roll clerks; loft robberies; safes opened and looted. None were under twenty-five thousands dollars in value, some were around the quarter-million mark. Many of the perpetrators were in custody, some were convicted. All were men of mediocre intellect.

"There's a man behind," said the commissioner, as casually as if he was referring to a pail behind the door of his office. "No set of crooks, working each for himself, would hit on so many common ideas of planning and executing so many different crimes. If your snaky-face Gregory knows Micky the Maggot, why is he dancing and boozing at a millionaire's home on Fifth Avenue as well? Why was Micky the Maggot there? Why did Gusset come into a room as you have just told me, where there was a bit of silk like this that was stolen in North River, just after Gusset was killed? You've got a lot of leads. You have a social entrée where these two rare birds have a swell hangout. No other cop in New York can get in there, unsuspected, but Roger Warren.

"I give you *carte blanche*. Go anywhere. If you need money, call for it. Keep me posted personally. If you need help, call on any officer in this city or any other city. I'll stand back of you. Get results. Don't worry about certainties. Follow your hunch. Hunches sometimes lead to certainties."

CHAPTER XIV

CHIEFLY CONCERNING TWO DWARFED SOULS

RARELY—almost never, in fact—does control of a criminal case pass from the hands of ranking officers of the police department to the head of the entire department. There is no such necessity for such procedure. Nor is it the commissioner's function.

Captains, inspectors, deputy commissioners are always in control. They were still in control of the North River robbery. The Fifth Avenue affair passed into apparent judicial finality before noon of the same day. Warren was arraigned, Murdock was there. The magistrate exonerated the young officer and Murdock congratulated him in open court.

The commissioner, therefore, was merely putting out an anchor to windward in sending Roger Warren alone on his mission. This, too, is unusual. Detectives usually hunt in pairs. There are reasons. But these reasons did not apply to Warren in this instance. To have sent along another officer would have been to invite immediate suspicion on the part of the suspected men. With Gusset dead, his supposed slayer exonerated, the case was officially closed. Why should two detectives follow it further? That question would have been one which the furtive and guilty would certainly have asked.

No other officers were assigned to follow up this clew. It was not a genuine clew. The "Heir Apparent" sample of silk lying on Murdock's desk was there before the North River robbery. Hence, it could not have been part of the proceeds of that robbery. The distinction is im-

portant both in its bearing on genuine police methods and more important in what afterward developed.

Nor was Warren told of the revelation made by Inspector Montrose. That, too, was not only unnecessary but would have frustrated at the outset the nimble-witted young detective's best efforts. It would have introduced a new factor into the entire situation, creating confusion in his thoughts and leading him far afield from a concentrated purpose. As it was, the door for Warren was still open.

"You must call up Audrey," said her father, as Warren left the courtroom, "and tell her, yourself, of your discharge. She talked with me about you this morning and told me of your dog. My daughter wants to take him down to our place in the country, she says. I hope you'll permit it. I've never refused her a request in all my life."

"Thank you, sir," said Warren. "Suppose you call her up and then I'll talk with her?"

Her father called her up. Audrey was delighted. She asked Warren to come home with her father for luncheon. Warren excused himself on the ground of duty, but, under her reiteration of the request, promised to "drop in, later in the afternoon, if possible."

Murdock was in high fettle. His alibi now had a court record to rely upon, an excellent thing under the circumstances. He was not displeased that Warren also refused the invitation to luncheon, since Gregory was coming to the house to talk over the shipment of silk that must be made within two days.

"Gregory was right," mused Murdock as he drove homeward. "I don't like cops any better than he does, as a rule, but they have their uses. This chap is a gentleman as well as a cop. The closer a real headquarters cop is to me these days, the better protection I have—

that is, if he isn't too close—but just close enough, like this lad. Besides, he saved my life."

Roger hurried home. Fortunately the garbage can had not yet been emptied and he fished in it until he retrieved the blood-stained bit of silk. He shook it clear of debris and put it carefully away until his next trip downtown to report to the Commissioner.

Then he got into another suit of clothes, was shaved, and after his own late luncheon, sallied forth to keep his call at the Murdock mansion.

Audrey Murdock was in a similar frame of mind about her attire. Luncheon over, she donned a simple but bewitchingly pretty gown. No shadow from the gruesome night before fell across her path until she started downstairs.

Gregory had arrived and was in the library with her father. The door was closed and their tones were audible but not their words. At first hearing Gregory's voice, Audrey felt a sudden loathing as she remembered his attitude the night before when they were dancing.

She was no eavesdropper. Her pause was involuntary. It was of her father she was thinking. If Gregory's influence was evil for her, it could not be good for her father.

She sighed as she again started downstairs. All traces of the previous night's frolic were long since gone. The room was decorous enough, but the time seemed interminable. Audrey was wondering what bond existed between her father and Gregory; her intuitions and presentiments of the night before stalked back, like wraiths, to depress her more.

"Why should that strange man enter the house to kill father?" she asked herself. "I'm sure he did. Not to rob him. I wonder—no, Gregory could not want to injure father. But who else would and why?"

The sound of laughter filtered through the closed library door to her ears. She stood irresolutely.

Within the library two dwarfed souls conferred.

"They sprung Yates," said Gregory, with a lazy leer that did duty for a self-satisfied smile. "He's out and on his way to the Argentine."

Murdock's stentorian laughter volleyed through the room.

"Why not?" he jeered. "What else could they do? There isn't a real brain in that entire police department. They're a lot of turnip-headed boobs—spigots on the barrel of the public treasury.

"I didn't give them a straw to pick up, did I? The silk's in our warehouse, in the packing cases we got from Japan, they're stencilled, we've got the custom house receipts for import duty, the bills of lading from the railroads, the lighterage charges receipted—what chance have the cops got to get us?"

"You're a wonder," said Gregory admiringly. "But, if you'll allow me—"

"Shoot, Gregory."

"I wouldn't take too much for granted. We had a narrow squeak with Gusset last night. The old adage, you know: 'The pitcher that goes too often to the well—'"

"Proverbs were made for fools. They listen to them. I don't. However, I don't propose to get careless. I'm not in this game to be grabbed and take an apartment with free electric lights, free attendants, free meals—in that villa up the river. I'm in it because it's the greatest game in the world. To sit back, in the dark, to pull the wires, to manipulate the puppets."

"I feel the same way or I wouldn't be with you," said Gregory. "But I feel, also, that 'eternal vigilance is the

price of liberty,' although I hate to quote another proverb and look a fool in your eyes."

"My boy, you'll never look a fool in my eyes. You are the only man in the world whom I know that's a man after my own heart. You play the game the way I play it. You don't act like a strange cat in an alley. You go up the alley like a bulldog after a sick cat and you bring home that cat's hide. You did last night. Now, listen:

"I have contemplated and am perfecting a plan of gigantic scope. It is by far the biggest idea I have ever had. It will be the biggest deal we have ever attempted. The profits will be fabulous. The blow-off will be correspondingly loud, but the blow-back will be nil! Do you get me?"

"No, I only hear you making a statement. You have always gone after big fish—in business. You have harpooned whales. You have never netted for minnows. Tell me about it so I will understand. I cannot until I know the details."

Into Murdock's eyes crept a look of superlative craft. His bland face was smiling, but his cryptic manner deepened.

"Not yet, Gregory. We mustn't send the pitcher too often to the well—when there's no necessity. Besides, this isn't ripe, as yet. The plan must be absolutely perfect. The result must be predetermined beyond all possibility of a doubt. Then you'll know—everything."

Gregory smothered his disappointment with a feigned smile.

"Until then," said he, "I'll wonder about your next business whale, where it is, and how'll you fry the blubber. I'll just pass the time of day with Audrey and—"

He stopped. His roving eye, looking toward where

Gusset had laid the night before caught sight of something just beyond. A spot on the tapestry paper of the library wall gleamed white. Gregory bent down, then looked at Murdock, and pointed at the place.

"The proverbs—excuse me, sir. But, isn't that a bullet hole?"

Murdock came over, glanced at it, shrugged his shoulders, and laughed mirthlessly.

"It is. But I didn't make it. His head was over there." He pointed a few feet farther along. "Let the cops explain it. They can find more explanations for things than a bear can find berries on a mountain. I wouldn't patch that hole—well, for the price of that silk we'll ship to-morrow. Proverbs be hanged. Gregory, that's how the boobs get caught. They're too careful."

CHAPTER XV

NYMPH AND SATYR

IN the hall below Gregory caught sight of Audrey looking out. Warren was a long time coming. Gregory descended with a resurgence of his feelings of the night before. The past was dead. This girl lived. She was as symmetrical as a nymph—a nymph by daylight, and the hall became the depths of a forest, a lane in which he was free to pursue.

She walked into the parlor at her right, not noticing him. He paused as he reached the door, looked in, went in. He was a sorry substitute for the caller she was expecting, but Gregory did not know that.

"My dear Audrey, how are you to-day?" he asked solicitously.

"Quite well, thank you. And you?" Her tone was polite, no more.

"If I had been dying, a glimpse of you would have restored me to perfect health," he returned gallantly.

"Let us hope the occasion never requires so absurd a remedy," she retorted.

Gregory laughed. He was courteous in little things and his laugh was not loud. "The occasion is here—and the remedy, fortunately, is here too. I'm always dying—for a sight of you."

Her displeasure was mild, but meant for him to see. He ignored it, although he read it plainly in her eyes and attitude.

"I don't know how many girls there are in this city," he went on, his voice a purr. "I see them dimly and fleetingly. I always see you clearly and continuously—whenever I am near you, very often when I'm not. What would you say that meant, Audrey?"

"Don't people who see things too dimly consult an oculist?" she parried.

She wanted to evade him, yet she wanted to avoid offending him. She half-tolerated him for her father's sake. Gregory was in her father's confidence. Just what that signified she did not know, but as surely as a blind man's cane tells him the water is deep at the edge of a curb where he pauses, so surely intuition told Audrey that deep waters might lie at her father's feet, dangerous currents, deadly whirlpools.

Gregory came closer. His smile was more confident. He loved her in his way better for her timorous effort to avoid him. Her wit was keen. He liked that, too. It gave zest to his pursuit.

"The oculist who could remedy my faulty vision has not yet been born. Eros is the blind god, Audrey, and his affliction is transmitted to his victims. Last night,

we danced. My arms were around you, but I was your captive. I was happier than if I had been an emperor, in a chariot of gold, with the purple robe, the laurel wreath, and the plaudits of minions ringing in my ears."

Audrey quivered. Her repugnance was greater because the situation was half her own fault. She blushed and he mistook the blush for a responsive sentiment to his own glowing but unholy flame.

"Ah!" He came nearer. "Audrey, I said that last night my arms were around you. That was true. But your arms were around me, as well. You put them there. Not for worlds would I have removed them. Your exquisite face was upturned to mine. I've lived long and come far for that moment. Your eyes, your lips, your body—"

She was in his arms—but only for an instant! She tore herself away, her eyes blazing, her face crimson with anger. Her tones were incoherent at first, then they steadied and her bell-like voice rang out in frantic, furious protest.

Seated alone in the library above, Murdock glanced at the small mark on the wall.

"Warren told me his gun was a .32 caliber," he thought. "So's mine. But my foot slipped, just there. I wonder if I'm slipping in other ways? Nonsense! I mustn't get morbid. What's the odds? How should I know how many times a cop shot at a burglar or a burglar shot at a cop? The cops don't know. Warren couldn't know I shot. He couldn't see me shoot and he couldn't hear me shoot. I'll stake my life on that. He told Montrose and Marsh and Dell that he killed Gusset. He admitted it here last night. He admitted it in court again to-day.

"It's part of a court record now. No, I wouldn't patch

that spot because that would be evidence against me. Now it's evidence for me. But Gregory saw it. He's keen, and he's getting keener. I've got to be more careful, even with him. If Gregory should fail me——"

He rose, still pondering details of his most magnificent of all plans. He opened the door and then, from below, he heard the burr of anger in Audrey's tones, the protesting responses of Gregory—not words, just tones. Murdock's magnificent reverie was ended.

He walked to the head of the stairs and looked down. He could not see them, even then, but his face was suffused with a rush of hot blood, the geyser of his anger. Murdock rarely allowed himself the luxury of bad temper. He was angry now because of Audrey, and chiefly because Audrey was unmistakably angry with his partner, the man on whom he could always rely.

"Gregory!" Murdock spoke the name like the crack of a whip.

The junior partner emerged from the parlor.

His air was not crestfallen. His head was erect. He was baffled but not beaten. Audrey, crying softly, remained within the parlor.

Murdock dared not trust his voice to speak.

Besides, he did not want to add to Audrey's humiliation by a hint that he had overheard, that he sensed what had been happening.

He jerked his head. The gesture spelled: "Up here!"

Gregory jauntily ascended the stairs. He tried to appear casual, to assume an attitude that nothing had happened. He had never seen Murdock angry—at him. He dreaded the walk behind the stalking older man, the closing library door was pregnant with ominous possibilities.

Gregory crushed it all down. His hand did not tremble

as he lighted a cigarette and took the chair across the desk from Murdock toward which his partner waved.

Murdock did not waver. He knew the power that Gregory possessed over him. Again, as on the night before, he staked all on one cast of the dice of—business!

An anonymous "tip" from this man to the police, perhaps a tip sent after he had himself fled, and Murdock would be undone, a felon, perhaps a man condemned to death. But where Audrey was concerned, Murdock would have faced death stolidly.

Despite his far-flung imagination, his adroitness, his ability to think months ahead if need be, James Murdock had never dreamed that this sort of situation would arise; that the one man in whom he reposed all but his most secret thoughts would ever sit opposite him as he sat now.

Murdock glared. He controlled his anger with difficulty. Had Gusset not entered that room the night before, Gregory and not the prison derelict might have gone down on the same rug with a soundless bullet in his brain.

"I'm going to give it to you straight from the shoulder," said the older man at last. His tone was so quiet that it surprised himself. "We're both crooks. No, not that, we're both super-crooks. Yes," he mused. "I guess that's the page we occupy in the catalogue. We're much the same breed of cats. If we were not we wouldn't be working together. We differ in that I'm a far older man. You're young. The road ahead is clear and long for you.

"I don't want to quarrel with you. You're too capable a man. I merely want you to understand what I'm going to say. I want you to remember it. It's my first word and my last on a topic that is taboo from the time you leave this room."

Gregory nodded. He was inclined to be resentful, not at Murdock, but at Audrey.

"Audrey is different. She's not of our class," went on

Murdock. "She's really too beautiful, too wonderful to be my daughter. You see, I'm quite frank with you. Now, Gregory, having admitted that, I want to say this: if I am not worthy of such a daughter, you are not worthy of such a wife as Audrey. That's my first and last word on that. I don't blame you for admiring her. That's a fine trait in you, although I never suspected it until five minutes ago."

Gregory shifted his feet uneasily. The arctic tone he had heard before, but it concerned other men who had dared disobey Murdock. Their fate was sometimes unpleasant. It was always unmentioned between the senior and junior partners.

"Stop where you were when I spoke your name. Execute a right-about face. From this instant until the end of time, you discontinue any attentions of an intimate sort with my daughter."

He paused and looked unflinchingly at the silent figure opposite. When he resumed, his tone was more amiable.

"Gregory, I have trusted no man. But I trust you. I've put my liberty—perhaps my life—in your hands, without hesitation. Now I'm going to entrust you with a more precious thing than either. It's my honor. I still trust you. I understand you. I don't criticize you, although I expressly forbid you to force your intentions upon my daughter.

"I put you upon your own honor, Gregory, in this matter. That's all. What do you say?"

Gregory tossed away his cigarette. Over his face came a look of high regard, the look he could command at will, the look that was a more subtle and insinuating flattery than a volume of well chosen words.

"What else can I say but that I agree? I may be a crook. Yes, we both are. Just as you've said, although not ordinary crooks. When you appeal to my honor, you

hit me where I am vulnerable. There is honor among thieves. You know it. I know it."

He stepped from his chair, straightened, thrust his hand across the desk, looked Murdock full in the eye.

"I pledge you my word, sir, now and henceforth, to respect your wishes to the utmost. I will not misuse this faith you have reposed in me. It is a higher honor than if you had said: 'Gregory, I'm a crook. I know it. But you're an honest man.' There's my hand on it. You have sealed my loyalty to you with a bond that I could not break if I would."

Murdock extended his hand and gripped that of the younger man.

"Thank you," he murmured. He held the outstretched palm as if in a vise. Gregory bore the pain like a martyr at the stake. Then the older man turned away, releasing his iron clasp. He walked to the window and pretended to look out. He was deeply moved, but the episode was over. Murdock was again what he had said he was—a crook.

So was his junior partner. But he was no less Audrey's lover than when he had entered that room.

Thereafter they chatted freely of other things. The breach was healed.

CHAPTER XVI

GREGORY TAKES CHARGE

THE door bell sounded soon after the library door had closed on Murdock and his junior partner for their conference. Audrey's transition from humiliation and wrath was instantaneous.

"He's here. My nose is red!" The bird that has

found its mate does not wear draggled plumage. She fled more swiftly than from Gregory's repulsive advances to her own room.

Her heart told her that Roger Warren wouldn't mind a moment of delay. She ran to her mirror. Her shining eyes said: "Who are you, anyway? You're not the girl you were a moment ago!"

Blithely she erased the telltale tracks of tears. Joyfully she stepped down the main stairway, humming a little tune under her breath—a tune that welled up from the orchestra of her throbbing heart.

It was just as well, although her caller was not Roger Warren, but Mrs. Edithe Winthrop. Audrey liked Edithe, although she gushed and tossed coquettish glances at young men and more ardent ones at Harry Gregory. This dashing, exuberant, wealthy young widow, who had married for money and not for love, was her buckler, her shield for the time being, against Gregory, who was still upstairs with her father.

So Audrey's greeting was candidly cordial, the more so, perhaps, because Edithe's arrival, while unanticipated and in lieu of Warren's, did not cancel her own delight at the thought of the latter—it merely postponed its actuality and heightened the sense of her anticipation.

"My dear Audrey! How well you look. You have *verve,* my dear. I'm amazed. After last night—the party and the way it ended—"

Her voice trailed off in a series of semi-blissful coos, like those of a dove in a strange cote.

Edithe had not seen Warren, save momentarily, and then as the officer whose curt orders were calm but cold. No, Edithe had not seen the hazel eyes beneath unwrinkled lids, eyes whose quiet candor made Audrey wonder what secret their possessor owned, that the cares of police

duty, the perils of the encounter through which he had just passed, had all passed him by.

Nor was Audrey wholly sorry. So she was the more glad to see Edithe and the young widow the more perplexed at Audrey's smiling nonchalance.

"The way it ended?" echoed Audrey. "Yes, I suppose it's natural that you should wonder. You didn't see the police, the superior officers, I mean. They were down here quickly, but you had gone. Then there was a detective, you saw him, I think.

"The detective saw the man come in at the window and he came in, too. The shots we heard were theirs. The burglar missed. The detective did not miss. Anyway, the burglar was about to shoot father—the burglar was shot! They took him away."

Audrey did not have to explain further.

"How romantic!" Edithe's tone held no more concern than if she had been at an "underworld" drama. "And the detective was unhurt?"

"Practically. A bullet from the burglar's pistol grazed his arm. Father told me that the detective saved his life. They are not cowards!"

"Oh, here's Mr. Gregory." Mrs. Winthrop's tone was fraught with such unconcealed delight that Audrey was hard put to it to restain a sarcastic smile. If Gregory only could have heard the young widow—and reciprocated. "And your father!" added the caller, as an afterthought, and in a way to suggest that fathers were part of the house furniture, but husbands, old and new, a gem without price.

The two men were smiling and chatting. They both came in to greet Mrs. Winthrop and Audrey. Murdock's mask softened. His enigmatic glance behind the other two completely reassured Audrey. She knew Gregory had been warned and had given his promise. The bond

between father and daughter was stronger than the night before, when it had been so strained, and Audrey, in her sudden access of joy as the bell rang again, forgot everything but her next caller.

It was Roger Warren.

Gregory saw him, too. Nor could he fail to note Audrey's face as its tints deepened, as the curve of her lips wreathed into a smile of welcome.

"Oh, hello, sergeant! Glad to see you." Murdock stepped forward with extended hand. "Rather different meeting from last night, eh?"

"I hope I'm not coming at an awkward time," said Warren, nodding slightly to Gregory. "The fact is, I've got one or two little details to pick up to complete my report."

"Mrs. Winthrop, Mr. Warren?"

Warren bowed. "I met Mrs. Winthrop—officially but briefly—last night." He was courteous, but not interested.

When the door had closed behind Mrs. Winthrop, Gregory gave Murdock a glance and slipped from the room like an eel. Murdock muttered an "excuse me a minute," and followed. Neither Warren nor Audrey noticed them.

"See here," demanded Gregory, when out of earshot, although his voice as not raised above a stealthy whisper. "We're honor-bound, aren't we?"

"We are," said Murdock. "Why?"

"That cop is back. Now don't stand on the top of your own feet. I know cops. This one is no muddle head. If he wasn't a cop he'd be a fine candidate for a minor rôle in—well, in big business. He's clever. You just fade out—get a cigar, anything, until I can look at him. He looked at me. He's not here to make up details

of a report. He did that this morning and his report's on file with his superiors.

"I'm right. Don't argue. Don't try to argue. Just be absent for a minute or two. Let me get a line on why he's here."

Murdock was not entirely willing, but Gregory capped the climax of his own feverish thoughts by adding: "There's a hole in the wall upstairs. Just run up to get a cigar. Stick a chair in front of it. If this cop comes up, you'll be sitting in that chair and you don't leave it until he leaves. I don't leave until he does, either. Understand?"

Murdock went—to get a cigar. He said so to Gregory and loud enough to be heard by both Audrey and Roger Warren. They did not hear him.

Gregory watched the little scene between them for a moment. Then he walked into the room and stared at Warren with the offensively superior mien he could assume at will.

"You came here on duty, I think you said," observed Harry Gregory pointedly.

They had broken off their chat at his entrance and Gregory found fresh annoyance in that. It was incredible that he should be a topic of their talk, but why they had suddenly stopped was fresh cause for suspicion.

"Yes," said Warren.

He limited his reply, for he scented a scene, and a scene with this man with Audrey witnessing it would be, to say the least, premature. If Gregory feared the police, Warren felt he would not antagonize a policeman; therefore, Gregory was jealous of him.

Gregory bowed. "Duty implies performance," he more pointedly continued. "Is there any way that I may aid you to complete yours——?"

His manner finished the sentence. It said: "What

right have you here? You're only a cop, after all! This girl is not a cop's plaything."

"Pardon me, Mr. Gregory," said Audrey frigidly. "I invited Mr. Warren to come."

"I beg pardon. I was not informed." Gregory's self-possession was enviable. He wondered why Murdock had not flatly said as much and had yielded so easily to his order to "go, get a cigar." Murdock was not in the habit of accepting orders. He gave them. Did he know Audrey had invited Warren to come? The cop had some discretion. He hadn't revealed that.

"I fear we are at cross purposes, Audrey. Perhaps I should make a more profuse apology. Your guests, however, are not usually from the members of the police force."

The girl was incapable of a reply. A chill of inward doubt tinted with fear fell over her. Her father's returning footstep was most welcome. She could not recall a time when it had been more eagerly desired.

Gregory turned back to meet Murdock, whose cigar exhaled an aroma foreign to the lower hall. Audrey was puzzled at this, too, for her father scarcely ever smoked except in the library.

As for Warren, he was plainly perplexed. Audrey read it and remarked: "Mr. Gregory is father's partner."

He bowed to cover his fresh surprise. One of his assumptions had been knocked from under him by the certainty of her statement. His groping mind fled to the scene where he had had his private interview that morning with the commissioner of police. He wondered if the commissioner knew that Gregory was Murdock's partner. He concluded that he did not, because when Warren had spoken of Gregory as an employee, he had not been corrected.

His first suspicions of Gregory while they had to be revised as to the relationship between the two men, hit him like a blow in the face—lest they should also lead to her father!

Meanwhile Gregory was broaching a new plan to Murdock in the hall. Murdock smiled.

"I let you have your head, Gregory. A boob detective doesn't give me mental delirium tremens. If he's a snake, show me his fangs. Audrey has him in the hollow of her hand. I saw that last night."

"All right, we'll go out," said Gregory, "You may be right. In fact"—his tone was now genuinely dubious —"I may be entirely wrong. Anyhow, let's go out, and then we'll know whether I'm right or wrong."

Murdock had to laugh. Gregory's swift words sounded like so much gibberish. The laugh was a stimulus to Roger Warren. It was too spontaneous to be a symptom of guilt.

"If Gregory is a crook, Murdock isn't," he said to himself. "He laughs like a boy of ten."

"Why should we go out?" mildly asked Murdock.

"To make him show his hand," said Gregory. "If he came to clean up a few odds and ends of his report, he'll do that. If he came to get something on us, he will have to call again and that will show his hand."

"I'm going to humor you," said Murdock tolerantly. "You were wrong when you asked me to go upstairs. I want you to get out of the habit of being frightened every time you see a cop. A cop is a cop. We're—well, we're business men, and we're always glad to see the cops. Mighty glad, sometimes. Last night for instance."

Gregory did not reply. He started for his coat and hat. Murdock signaled to have his car brought round and the two sauntered in to make their adieus.

"Mr. Warren," said Murdock genially, if there is any way I can aid you before I leave I'm entirely at your service—if it doesn't take too long."

"Thank you, sir. I will not detain you. The matter is of little consequence. If I might drop down at your office to-morrow—I can dispose of it as well there, perhaps better, than here."

The words were hardly his own for the daring flight of of the imagination that gave them birth was as unexpected "a hunch" as surprise at sight of Micky the Maggot dancing in the room just across the hall the night before. The hunch lighted a candle in his honest eyes, moreover, which even Murdock, suave, plausible, and predatory superman —as criminals go—could not help but see—and as it proved, read and interpret correctly within the hour.

"Mr. Warren," replied Murdock, "the only day I shall not be ready and willing to see you at any time will be the day the list of my honorary pallbearers will be known to my small circle of friends and my large circle of enemies."

He said it with unction that had honesty at its core. How could James Murdock say less to the man who had handed him back the life he lived and the intrigue he loved less than twenty-four hours before?

Gregory was hardly less plausible, although vastly less sincere. While Murdock kissed his daughter, Gregory said to Warren:

"These late parties and business don't mix. I must cut out one or the other. King Tut looks lovely—by night. My nerves! That sad affair that brought you into the house—well, you don't look as if you ever had a hangover, Mr. Warren. My head feels as if somebody had forged a steel ring around it! I need a month of sleep and a milk diet."

Warren was a poor dissembler when his own interests

were concerned. Yet Audrey Murdock's semiconfidence had already confirmed, in part, his first hunch about Gregory. So he said:

"I don't wonder." He turned to Audrey. "Well, I must be going, too, I guess."

"Not just yet," pleaded Audrey. "I want to talk to you about Patrol."

Gregory's smile at her lapsed into a jealous grimace as he went out the door. He climbed into the limousine with Murdock, they glided up to the corner, turned and melted into the tide of down town traffic.

"Patrol!" repeated Gregory disgustedly. "What did Audrey mean by that?"

"That you're saved from a dog's life," grimly replied his partner, "for if you hadn't given me your word of honor, you were in for one. That's the name of Audrey's newest whim—Warren's police dog."

He chuckled. Gregory knit his brows.

"What did Warren mean by that remark about calling at the office to-morrow?" he next demanded.

Murdock's face was bland and his cryptic air deepened.

"Now you're rounding back to form, Gregory. Always ask me. I know. He's a detective. He's a nice chap but he's a boob. I'll tell you what he'll ask me to-morrow. Let it be a warning to you to stay off that shiver stuff when a cop looms up, at least, while I'm on deck."

Gregory looked amazed. Had Murdock been acting a part—with him?

"Roger Warren will call on me to-morrow," said Murdock calmly, "to say that the silk stolen in the North River robbery was exactly like a sample that my daughter Audrey bandaged his arm with last night. He'll first apologize for putting that sort of a question to a man of my business standing.

"I'll lay every card on the table. He'll get enough to stuff his report full of facts. They are facts. I made them facts of record by wholly disinterested men before I saw to it that the silk I had sold would be delivered. Be on hand and see if I haven't got the cops tied to the post. They've been tied there, all these years, as you ought to know by now."

CHAPTER XVII

ONE BULLET AND TWO TEACUPS

"YOU'LL have tea with me," said Audrey.

Roger Warren smiled his acceptance. He smiled again at the delightful comradeship in her manner. A great wave of tenderness swept over him. The truth was that stalwart, self-reliant Roger Warren was "overboard."

For the time being Murdock had apparently outguessed both Warren and Gregory. Just as he thought he had outwitted the alert, experienced police veteran, Inspector Montrose, the night before, by his prompt denial that he knew Gusset. Inspector Montrose had not only ferreted the truth from that apparently "safe" lie, he had outguessed Murdock at his own game of frustrating police work in advance. Murdock had already taken the pistol to his office as his final alibi. Despite his bluffing manner toward Gregory, that same night he also pried the bullet that might have incriminated him from the library wall, tossed it into the ashes of his cellar, whence it was to pass to the garbage wagon.

Again he was outguessed. He prided himself on being a man of "business." He was—an exceptionally shrewd

man of business. But quite naturally he did not notice that the collector of garbage next morning had a little compartment in his wagon, as snugly partioned off as the private office of James Murdock in the great loft building on East River, where the boxes of stolen silk, labeled "Heir Apparent" brand, were now reposing.

Inspector Montrose could add. He kept working that day. All he needed was his brains—the same brains that had made him an inspector—and a knowledge of the sum of three and one.

Roger Warren's report, filed first at the headquarters of the Third Inspection District and then sent to the inspector at headquarters from which he was assigned on his roving commission, was read by Montrose. It contained this clause:

> "I shot three times at this intruder, for reasons already stated. My first shot, I think, must have struck his right forearm, for he did not fire at Mr. Murdock as he was about to do. My second shot followed his first shot at me. Surgeon Dell said it must have broken the upper right arm. I was trying to disable, not kill, this man, to me then unknown. My third shot apparently hit him squarely in the center of the forehead. The official autopsy should show this. I fired this shot after his second shot at me."

Three shots!

Having established the fact that Warren had shot thrice, it was not hard for Inspector Montrose to know there must have been a fourth bullet—the shot Warren had fired which did not hit the burglar at all.

Knowing Murdock had lied, Inspector Montrose set about getting that bullet. Knowing Warren did not know Murdock had lied, the inspector did not ask Warren to look for it. Nor did he seek to alarm the real

murderer of Satchel Gusset by sending any of his own men into or around Murdock's house.

The inspector knew Murdock, from sheer gratitude as well as from his desire to conceal and bury his own guilt, would be in court to aid in Warren's quick exoneration from the charge of technical homicide. He knew that Murdock would either send or carry that .320 caliber pistol to his office, but, as he had several offices, he did not know which one. It was immaterial which one, until the pistol bullet was recovered—Warren's bullet, the one that had missed Gusset entirely.

That was the reason for the little partition in the garbage wagon. It was there the morning after the killing. It was there the next morning. The second morning the garbage wagon contained the missing .32 caliber bullet. Inspector Montrose didn't say "Hell's bells!" as he had before, when finding three bullets in Satchel Gussett's body, two of .32 caliber and one of .320.

He had a saving sense of humor. He merely smiled when the bullet was brought to him by the detective who religiously rode that garbage wagon for six blocks and for two days, and said, "Thanks, Jimmy!"

That wasn't the detective's given name. The inspector was not thanking him. He was thanking James Murdock.

Hence, in the late afternoon before the inspector's two ironical words, Roger Warren was taking tea with the daughter of a man whose crime of murder was already known and against whom the net of evidence was already being woven for his too shrewd feet.

Roger Warren did not know that. And neither did the girl, who, after her long story of intuitions, fears, worries, and certitude of her parent's constant peril, could not restrain a gust of tears. Her distress revolved around her emphatic and final mention of Gregory's name.

Roger Warren had been listening, nodding now and again. His hunch was being verified, in minor details, perhaps, but the basis of his first instinctive flash that there was something off-color in the make-up of this same individual now found a parallel in the recital by Audrey.

He was between two fires. He was tremendously drawn to this girl. He wanted to comfort and reassure her. But duty forbade. He had been signally honored by the confidence of the head of the entire New York police department in a tangled, obscure and difficult piece of police business.

Singled out and *trusted!* This was Roger Warren's thought, and, despite his infatuation, he tried to thrust back this new, strange, mystical ecstasy. He tried to remember and, remembering, to stand four-square on the path of this extraordinary police detail, which he must pursue alone and unaided except as the commissioner had indicated, follow it wherever it led—in Manhattan or Greater New York or out of it—steadfastly, remorselessly, intelligently, and, above all other things, patiently.

He knew Audrey's emotion was genuine. She was too innocent to be artful, too inexperienced to be designing, too exquisitely poised to become the victim of a self-induced hysteria. Besides, every word she uttered confirmed his own estimate of Gregory.

He understood her perfectly, but not this extraordinary situation. Nor did Audrey comprehend it, for she neither knew her father's true nature, nor that upstairs in the library, following Gregory's advances to her in the same room where she now served tea to the young detective, her father's inflexible will had wrested from Gregory a pledge that Gregory would cease his attentions to his daughter.

Roger Warren was in a quandary. He thought hard

and fast, but his thoughts were chaotic, as mixed as Audrey Murdock's instinctive distrust of Gregory's intentions and his secret but powerful influence over her father was genuine.

"Something must be done," said he lamely. "I am greatly obliged, Miss Murdock. I think I'll go now. To-morrow I'll call on your father at his office and have a little chat with him."

"Oh, that will be a great comfort to me," said she eagerly, and the trace of tears fled before the ardor of her shining eyes. "You see, you can have a private chat with him and warn him against Gregory. He will listen to a man like you, a police officer. He will listen and be more impressed, because, don't you see—you saved his life. You *will* warn him, won't you?"

Warren felt himself slipping again. This was going from bad to worse. He could not promise to say anything like that, even to James Murdock, especially since he had just learned in this very house that Gregory was not Murdock's employee but his partner.

Murdock would not thank him for casting doubt on the integrity of his business associate; for that, even with an innocent man, would be equivalent to casting a similar doubt on the operations of the Murdock silk firm; if credited, it might necessitate investigations, explanations, and an alibi for the older man—all provided the trail of wrong-doing led definitely and with legal proof to the feet of the younger one.

Roger Warren knew the Commissioner of Police would never condone such blundering as that; for Murdock might let fall a word to Gregory; and Gregory, subtle, dexterous, would then destroy any vestige of proof which the department, either through Warren or other officers, might perchance otherwise dig up.

"I'm on police duty, you know," said he at last, "and

I must not make promises in advance. It's my duty to capture criminals, not to warn them, even indirectly."

He dared not, even to this glorious girl, pretend to a hypocritical neutrality where his duty was concerned. Nor could he compromise with it without stultifying himself.

"Don't you trust me?" asked Audrey.

"With all my heart!" replied Roger Warren.

"Then, why not promise me?"

He caught her hands and drew her close, the fluttering of her heart throbbing against his own.

"I trust you with all my heart, Audrey, because I love you," he said.

She clung to him. "It all seems too wonderful to be true!" she murmured.

"Nothing is too wonderful to be true," he told her.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE NEW ROAD AND THE OLD

NEITHER Audrey nor Warren could remember clearly how they came to find each other, after a while, with him sitting in the deep chair her father sometimes used, and with her perched upon its arm stroking his hair. Her smile was wistful and tender, but not yet gay. By degrees Roger Warren was coming back to a consciousness that there were such things as walls and chandeliers—and clocks and watches.

"I must be going," he said.

She caught her breath. "Oh, not yet, Roger—not yet." Then, very penitently. "Forgive me, dear. Of course you must go. But may I not drive you down town?"

He compromised. "Not down town, up town as far as my home. I'll just drop in on mother a moment and then take the subway. It will be quicker."

Audrey was ready and her car at the door in a trice. They drove leisurely northward, chatting.

This new and close intimacy, however, did not prevent him from making a tactful inquiry about her guests of the night before. It was the skilled sleuth's "approach by indirection," for the most important facts are sometimes thus disclosed in actual police business where least suspected. Roger was still on the trail of Mike the Maggot, and of Harry Gregory.

"I only knew a few really well," said she. "Perhaps a dozen girls I knew at school or since leaving, whom I've met at other places, and their friends. It was a very informal affair. A lot of people were just performers, hired by Freddy Carrington. Some were friends of Mr. Gregory, some of Mrs. Winthrop's."

Warren, having met Mrs. Winthrop, could hardly conclude that Mike was on terms of social intimacy with her. He did not press his queries, remarking instead:

"Speaking of Gregory: I think he will be less likely to renew his attentions toward you if you treat him as if the matter was entirely forgotten. Besides, I am sure Gregory dislikes me; and if he sees me with you now and then, he will be less likely to annoy you."

"You're a dear!" said Audrey. "I can't kiss you, now, without violating some highway law or other, can I? I had to claim I knew them all when I got my driver's license, also that I wasn't blind in either eye, paralyzed, and had never been convicted of a crime. You'll have to teach them all to me, and then I can kiss you before and after each lesson, can't I—or in between?"

Her radiant smile seemed to say that such a thing as

gloom or depression might have once existed, but was now forever dead and buried.

"I shall take no fees for the instruction except those you promise," said Warren, with mock gravity. "Just one thing more, while we're on the subject of Gregory—and ourselves. To protect your father and you it is necessary that I learn what I can about Gregory. That's straight police business as well. If he's not on the level, then he's crooked. If he's crooked, he should be jailed. If my investigation hits this sort of a bull's eye, with Gregory for a target, I may be able to kill three birds with one stone. You understand?"

"I'm so glad that you you didn't promise me what I asked," said Audrey. "It is all quite plain, now."

"Now, one further thing: until I've finished investigating Gregory, never to any one—not even to your father—by word, look, or thought, allow the fact that I'm trailing Gregory to become known. Your father might not thank me. He never saw me until last night. He's in business with Gregory. He might think me a meddler, a presuming fellow who was taking advantage of his gratitude—don't you see?"

"Perfectly," said Audrey, as she stopped her car at the little apartment house. "We won't tell any one anything, or just yet about yourselves. We'll just live in our own little world of love and hope until we get ready to announce our engagement. Not even to your mother, just yet. Mothers don't like to think some one else has —well, has come to carry away their boys, do they?"

They stopped for a word with Warren's mother, and then Roger announced that he must go down to headquarters to report.

Audrey ran into the hall with him.

"I've the grandest idea," said she, kissing him swiftly. "Can I get Patrol a new collar to-morrow? And put a

monogram with both our initials on it and take him down in the country? I want to get away from the house for a few days!"

Warren laughed and nodded. Audrey was in the spring of youth, the dawn of a life whose brilliance seemed beyond the pale of evil, as he hurried to the subway. He had not forgotten his huge task, he had made a slight but discernible beginning in this one phase of it, and to-morrow he would call on Mr. Murdock and see how far that clew of the costly silk his daughter had tied upon his wounded arm would lead.

At headquarters he wrote out his report and came back home for a few hours' sleep. It had been a wonderful day, packed with many incidents, one of which he knew marked a milestone in his life. He recalled the words of the police commissioner: "Nothing is too wonderful to be true." They were true words. He fell asleep, smiling and thinking that the head of New York City's department of public safety had no idea how wonderful and how true they were.

He was up betimes and telephoned the Murdock Silk Company, and James Murdock replied when Warren gave his name.

"Always glad to see you, Warren," said he, heartily. "Got to run out for a minute. Come right over. I'll be back directly."

Warren went. A little woman, looking as if she were prematurely old and living in the shadow of a perpetual fear, ushered him into the plain but well-appointed private office.

Nothing was lacking. The trays on the desk, the neat pile of corerspondence on the glass slab with its ornate paper weight, waiting return of the head of the firm, the files, the handy telephone, were all irreproachable. The rest of the building seemed keyed to a different note

from this brisk, modern efficiency. It was old, although not decrepit. From below came confused sounds, trucks rumbled in and out, hammers banged against nails, the roar of passing vehicles on cobblestones added each its note to the song of commerce.

Murdock came in briskly. He carried a small package which he slipped into the top right-hand drawer of his desk. To Warren's relief, Gregory was not with him.

"Ran out to get a dog collar for Audrey. She's gone to give the jeweler an order for a name plate. For Patrol, she said. I hope, Mr. Warren, you didn't let my spoiled daughter wheedle you out of your pet. Yes, she's spoiled. And she's got me spoiled, in a way, for business. Between you and me, she can always get anything she wants out of me. Now, what can I do for you?"

Warren produced the stained silken bandage, and called attention to its unusually high quality and the trade-marked name, "Heir Apparent." Murdock nodded.

"I know the brand very well. I've dealt in it for years. This sample was on my desk. I remember that it was with some papers of mine which I was looking at in the library when that chap came in to rob me."

"That's a weight off my mind, Mr. Murdock," said Warren. "The fact is that a large quantity of this silk has been stolen. Now, as you're in this line, will you do me a favor?"

"A hundred of them, my boy, if you want them. You did me the greatest favor of my life, you know."

"Thank you, sir. The coincidence of the name of this silk Heir Apparent brand occurred to me at once when I learned details of this other criminal affair, the North River robbery, I mean, at headquarters, yesterday morning."

He paused. He was feeling his way carefully since Gregory was Murdock's partner.

"Very naturally," nodded Audrey's father, tendering him a cigar and lighting one for himself. He tilted back in his chair and looked at his caller impersonally but still as kindly as before. "Now, what's the favor?"

"This occurred to me, sir. You're in this business. You have many employees. All of them may not have the high ideals or the business experience that you have. If any of them, high or low, should be offered some of this silk at a bargain price, they might be tempted to purchase it—especially if your other interests called you elsewhere, as they might do, at the time of the offer."

Murdock smiled and shook his head.

"We never buy silk from any but the most reputable firms. This Heir Apparent brand you mentioned—we only buy that in Japan and import it under our own name. My employees are well trained, too well trained to break the rules I make for them. I might have been robbed myself, but for sheer luck. I just received a shipment of the same silk from Japan a few days ago. That's how I came to have that sample in my desk, or on it."

This was different news from what Warren had expected. However, his conjecture as to Gregory was a plain hunch. The slender link that bound Satchel Gusset to Yates in another crime was also twelve years old.

While he was thinking and covering his bewilderment by lighting the cigar Murdock had given him, Audrey swept into the room like a being from another sphere. Warren wasn't sorry; nor was her father.

"Oh, good morning!" She fairly ran to the young detective and extended both her hands. Her father beamed fatuously as fond fathers always do.

"Can you imagine," went on Audrey, turning to her

father. "Patrol jumped into the car with me as if he'd known me all his life. He's going with me down on Long Island. But excuse me. You're talking business. I'll be back, daddy, a little later."

She whisked out as suddenly as she had come.

Murdock grinned and shook his head. The gesture said: "Can you deny a girl like that anything? She always has her own way with every one."

"Where were we? Oh, yes, I was telling you how I import this silk," resumed Murdock. "Come downstairs and meet my young partner, Harry Gregory! Oh, that's so, you met him yesterday at the house. Well, come along anyway and see how we carry on the silk business. We buy from local or domestic mills as well as import, you know."

Warren went. He did not see Audrey's return. He did hear her call down to ask her father if he had bought the dog collar and he heard her father tell her that it was in the "top, right hand drawer" of his desk.

Audrey went to get it. She was alone in the private office. She opened the drawer and took up the package containing the new dog collar. Beneath it lay the pistol which her father kept there. She looked at the weapon. Its absence from the house—as she supposed—had brought into her life this young detective. It was a curious way for Cupid to shoot an arrow—with an automatic pistol!

Audrey picked it up. Her imperiled father had been spared the necessity of defending his own life. Roger Warren, her fiancé now, had done that and unhesitatingly risked his own life to do it.

She gazed at the pistol and fondled it as she thought of the strange things that a few hours had brought. That pistol—by its absence—was, in a way, responsible for her happiness.

It was clean, bright, polished. It had not been fired.

Audrey did not know that the little woman in the outer office, who went about her work with an air of perpetual timidity, was now watching her every movement, furtively but maliciously, through the crack in the partially closed door, watching with eyes that shone with weird glee.

"You blessed little shiny black thing," whispered James Murdock's daughter, turning the weapon over and over in her bare hands. The glow of her heaven sent romance grew as she replaced it in the drawer of the desk. She walked out of the room like one in a trance.

As she emerged from the building, Patrol's nose was pressed against the glass of her coupé door and her mood changed. She must hug somebody. Patrol would do. She got into the car without letting the animal get out, drew on her driving gauntlets, and then she took his face between her hands as she had the pistol a moment before, whispering exultantly:

"Roger's inside—yes. But you can't see him just now. He's busy. But you'll see him to-morrow, maybe, and in the loveliest place. We're going there now."

Patrol licked her gloved hands and she drove away.

CHAPTER XIX

A VULTURE'S NEST

ROGER WARREN'S hunch that Harry Gregory was a crook, his sure knowledge that Mike the Maggot was a questionable character, and his belief that the silken bandage on his arm had been—perhaps—a symbol of the North River silk robbery, had

received a slap in James Murdock's matter of fact and apparently sincere reply to the carefully framed words with which the young detective sergeant had touched on that topic. If these things were all tangles in a skein of crime, Warren felt he could not unravel that skein after Murdock's reply.

Warren had completely forgotten the revelry of the party at Murdock's home; his thoughts were not of any of the guests save the one member of the former gang which once met and hobnobbed at the Old Mill in the "good old days." He had never seen Freddy Carrington, and, although he had met Edithe Winthrop, he had no thought for her just then.

While Roger Warren was being escorted by James Murdock through the old building fronting on East River, listening respectfully to the older man's remarks, Freddy Carrington, in his bachelor apartment on Madison Avenue, having emulated "King Tut" by sleeping off his alcoholic over-indulgence the night of the party, and then indulging in another prolonged rest to sleep off its reaction, was just emerging from his shower bath and submitting to his valet's aid prior to facing the cruel world—cruel because Edithe Winthrop would have none of his frantic offers of marriage.

Simultaneously, also, as Audrey Murdock sent her little coupé spinning down a Long Island boulevard to James Murdock's country home, and Patrol, his nose flat against the window at times was thinking of his vanished master, Mrs. Winthrop was smiling softly to herself in her West End Avenue apartment, thinking how she would trap Harry Gregory and end his infatuation for Audrey with the method a beautiful orchid might employ to snare an unwary fly.

When Murdock and Warren emerged from the outer

office and strolled through the building where Harry Gregory was, Mike the Maggot was eating a breakfast brought him on a tray by an obsequious servant in the building known as the Versailles Supper Club.

Mike was no longer "the Maggot." Manhattan had changed like a chameleon. Gone was "the old Bowery," with its glaring vistas of saloons, dance halls, dens and dives; gone was the "New Tenderloin" above Twenty-Third Street, between Broadway and Ninth Avenue; gone was it successor, which had a short but roaring existence in the upper Fortie's and Fifties.

The war was long since over, and young men who had been overseas and whose previous lives had been spent in predatory and parasitic pursuits were returning. To their credit be it said that some were changed; others fresh from the cockpit of Europe had become more callous. And of the latter Mike Marvin, formerly Mike the Maggot, was one. He was now Michael LeMar, and his dexterous legs, which formerly did a "statue clog" in the vanished cabaret show at the Old Mill, had carried him into the "lounge lizard" class before the Eighteenth Amendment and police and hotel detectives again drove Mike and his ilk from the "afternoon tea" dances around Manhattan.

Mike was as changeful as the changed city. More so, in fact. He was an elusive sort, and always had been. Even in the "good old days" Mike Marvin, although often under suspicion and frequently arrested, managed to "eel out" of the clutches of the law.

Mike was still "eeling." His supper club was just around the corner and on a respectable street, not far from the bachelor apartment of Freddy Carrington. The young society "sap" who had evolved the sensational novelty for Audrey Murdock's party knew there was a club

there, but he did not know its owner nor his previous unsavory record. Mike dexterously avoided the net of nationwide prohibition by making his club a very "high class" place. Admission was by an engraved card of invitation only, and no bums were tolerated—that is, among the guests.

Here Mike's knowledge of the lower strata of Manhattan life proved valuable. He could spot and stop a police officer in plain clothes at the door. The equivocal manner in which a few magistrates sometimes interpreted the State law against places selling liquor was an aid to him, although the magistrates were in blissful ignorance of it. There were exceptions to this, but not numerous ones.

Mike the Maggot had camouflaged his methods of operating, but not the ends which his like always have in view—an easy living at all times. He maintained a judicious mixing with the silk hat crooks as well as those desperate and hungry ones whose attire would not pass muster as guests at the Versailles Supper Club, no matter how well lined the same desperate, conscienceless evildoers might be from the proceeds of some recent job. Mike knew his little book. He picked out victims there, despoiling them elsewhere.

This supper club, moreover, did not open its doors until after the theatres closed their doors for the night. Its patrons were recruited from affluent residents and visitors alike. Gambling was taboo. Experienced spotters among the chambermaids or clerks at hotels and ushers or other employees at theatres saw to it that the needful invitations were placed in the hands of the right people.

Those patrons from near by were well aware that Manhattan had been "cleaned up" by the police depart-

ment, and they resented this abridgment of their personal liberty accordingly. Those from outside the city who visited it were equally willing and often eager to find that which was no longer easily found—a place where wine, women and song held high but discreet revelry, when the balance of the city was sleeping to make ready for another day of activity.

No rough stuff was permitted in the Versailles Supper Club. It was not necessary, although many underworld victims were selected there. The cover charge was large enough to impress a blasé old-timer or chill a novice. The furnishings of the place were luxurious and refined; its menu and wine card the best; its atmosphere was that of a high class club in the foyer and of the old Delmonico's in the dining rooms. It had smoking rooms for men and women; deft maids glided hither and yon; men attendants cared for their male escorts as solicitously as in any modern hotel; the orchestra was irreproachable, and the hangings to the windows were thick enough to prevent any ray of light from straying outside. Autos were parked for blocks in side streets, after depositing their owners at the canopied entrance.

The handsome old house had been renovated and transformed as well as redecorated. This had cost more money than Mike the Maggot could have earned in a thousand lifetimes in the good old days. The cost was not paid by Michael LaMar, either. Nor was he the actual owner, although the title deed was recorded in that name.

Another deed had also been made out, signed by Mike before the first one was recorded, acknowledged before a notary public, sealed in due legal form in every way. This deed reposed in the safe-deposit box of another man, the man who was talking to Roger Warren as Mike the

Maggot was daintily nibbling at his well-browned toast in one of the upper rooms of his club.

"Yes," said James Murdock casually, as he piloted Roger Warren toward Harry Gregory, "we've handled a lot of silk in past years. It's a tricky business. If I had known how tricky, I'd have stuck to improved New York real estate. The up-town movement has made many men rich."

Warren nodded. He did not know that Murdock was reading his inmost thoughts any more than he knew Murdock owned the up-town property where Mike the Maggot was eating.

"Our importations of silk," suavely continued the detective's mentor, "are sometimes from France, Italy, Switzerland, and even from Persia. I've entirely too many irons in the fire to keep track of details, although I have to keep on top of the tricky market in prices. Gregory handles details."

Gregory walked over and nodded, not uncordially. His nerves were under complete control. Murdock had seen to that by the "sandpapering" they had received the day before.

"Sergeant Warren has asked me to do him a favor," said Murdock. He explained the request. "I have told him how little chance there is of our getting any stolen goods through regular channels, and am sorry not to be able to help him—or the police department. By the way, Gregory, when did our last purchase of Heir Apparent brand get in?"

"I'll have to look up the records, sir."

"I only asked," said Murdock, "because I told Warren that we were lucky not to have been robbed ourselves. Just for my curiosity, would you mind asking Mrs. Mallory to pick out the details of our cables, correspond-

ence, and all the rest of it? I'd like to look it over, and I dare say Mr. Warren would be interested, semi-officially of course, since the police department have a robbery of the same brand on their hands, as he told me."

"I'll see that it is procured for you, sir. There are the cases in which it was shipped from Japan." Gregory pointed.

Murdock strolled that way, and Warren followed. The stencils were plain, the customs house seals still visible, although they had been broken, as Murdock explained, after payment of the duties to the bonded warehouse.

The name of the firm was unmistakable. The various insignia the boxes bore could not have been successfully counterfeited except with infinite pains as well as expert knowledge of Japanese labels, and certainly not even then in the brief time since the North River job. All of which Warren noted.

"You have this silk still?" he asked Murdock.

"Blessed if I know. Got to look at the records. My impression, however, is that it was sold for immediate delivery on arrival. If so, it may have been shipped. Tell you better when we get back to my office."

Ten minutes later they were examining the records. First, there was a code-cable message to far-off Nippon, some weeks before. Murdock produced the code of his firm.

"Ordinarily," said he, affably, "I wouldn't do this, except after an order from the court. My private cable and telegraph code is part of my business. My business has enemies, competitors. When I beat them they wonder, sometimes they yelp. You can figure this cablegram yourself. Then you'll know its significance just as Gregory knew it, when it was sent."

"It is very simple, sir," said Warren after a few

minutes with pencil and paper. "That's quite clear. What next?"

The little woman who was introduced as Mrs. Mallory passed over other papers, replying to Warren's occasional queries in a flat, monotonous voice. She seemed familiar with the records. "Been with us ever since I took on Gregory," said Murdock casually. "Details, you know, always details."

The customs' house receipts for import duties were produced; the cancelled certified checks sent the broker for payment of the same import duties followed; the release from the bonded warehouse for the same number of stencilled cases as those whose numbers reposed in the fast-working brain of the young detective—he knew they were the same without referring to anything but his mental memoranda, taken when he looked at them; the bills of lading from the railroads next traced the shipment to the other side of the North River; then came the receipted bills for lighterage charges, with the name of the craft—everything in scrupulous order as befitted business.

"You've done me a greater favor than you thought you could do," said Roger Warren to the father of the girl he adored. His smile, his clear ingenuous eyes betrayed no more hint of guile than Audrey's own. He swept the papers into a compact pile, wrapping a band around them.

"I'm going to make a report to police headquarters that James Murdock knows no more about this silk robbery than if he'd always lived on the moon and never saw Manhattan Island," added the sleuth. "May I receipt for these to show, then return them to you?"

"You're the only man in the department that I would let have them without a subpœna although I appreciate the department's problems and its vigilance," said Mur-

dock benignantly. "When a man saves my life, I would be very ungracious to refuse him—anything."

The pause was significant. His police visitor thrilled. "Anything" covered a great deal.

Warren thanked him and left. Murdock turned to Gregory. The two men exchanged significant smiles.

"He fell," said Gregory. "He's a boob."

"So I told you yesterday," said Murdock. "Did you hear what he said?"

Warren reached headquarters as soon as he could and went directly to the detective bureau and first sought Second Deputy Commissioner Roxey.

"Will you please learn if the Commissioner can receive us?" he asked. "I wish you'd go up with me, sir. The North River silk robbery. I've located the stuff, that is, I can trace it."

Roxey stared. "Well, I'll be blowed!" said he under his breath. "Will I go with you? Will a cat crackle if you stroke her back the right way in cold weather? Don't talk too loud. I've got a wild man in there," he nodded toward his own private office. "Been bawling me out—calling the cops all sorts of names, about that same job."

Warren pricked up his ears.

"I'll tell you about it upstairs," said Roxey. "Wait a minute." He darted back to his own office, entered, emerged, and then the two sought the Commissioner of Police.

He was engaged, but their wait was a short one.

In point of time Freddy Carrington was just ordering a rare assortment of flowers, over his telephone, and directing delivery of them, with his card, to Mrs. Edithe Winthrop. Audrey was romping with Patrol, her father was receiving a telegram.

CHAPTER XX

ONE KNOT IN A TANGLED SKEIN

"MR. Commissioner," began Roxey, "I was just having a battle royal with a chap by the name of Jacques Molando, president of the Molando Silk Company, when Detective Warren, whom you personally assigned yesterday to a special detail, came in and asked me to come here with him about that North River silk job, night before last.

"Molando is a Frenchman," continued Roxey, "excitable sort, but a thorough business man. He's up in the air. His firm has its headquarters in New Jersey and they had a stick-up of their pay-roll about three months ago. That, of course, is not our immediate concern officially, but it has an important bearing on what he had to say to-day—and he didn't say it with flowers, he said it with brimstone and sulphur.

"Molando had a real grievance, too," went on the Deputy Commissioner. "This North River robbery was in our jurisdiction, at least nominally, and we're not ducking that responsibility. It was bad enough. What Molando showed me and what he said makes it worse.

"Here's a letter and a bill from the Murdock Silk Company of Manhattan. It recites delivery to Molando's Company of a large amount of 'Heir Apparent' brand of silk and incloses a bill at 2 per cent, ten days. Now, Molando says this firm has delivered to him early to-day the identical silk he lost in the North River robbery. He says he can prove it's the same silk, without aid from any dad-binged police department either. He showed me this."

Roxey carefully unwrapped a small, thin bit of pasteboard, about the length and width of a bolt of silk, obviously of Oriental manufacture, in the centre of which was an embossed monogram of the Molando company's trademark.

"Molando says this was manufactured for him, over in Japan, that one of these is at the core of every bolt of silk delivered to him by Murdock's concern, in the original unbroken packages sealed at the factory where it was made in Japan, but in Murdock's own packing-cases and repacked from Murdock's Manhattan warehouse. What do you think of that?"

"It looks like evidence that Murdock's concern handled the identical silk stolen in that job," said the Commissioner unhesitatingly, "but they might have an explanation that would let them out. We'll hear what Warren has to say. I sent him on a special detail after a chap named Gregory who works for Murdock, on just a plain hunch, only yesterday. But, first tell me what you told Molando."

"Well, I had to try to calm him down, of course. I told him that if this was true it only proved that this department ought to have enough men to perch one cop on every drop of water in and out of North River, as well as on every foot of pavement in Manhattan.

"He only got madder and asked me if I expected his concern to pay out a quarter of a million dollars for the silk that he'd been robbed of to the same thieves that probably robbed him, while we waited for the additional men. Then Warren came in and asked me to come up here. I told Molando I was coming to consult with you. I didn't mention Warren."

"Quite right, Commissioner. Now, Warren what have you to say?"

"I've just come from Murdock's place of business. I

think my hunch is good. Gregory is a slippery crook. Molando is right. It's his silk. But, you'll never get a jury to convict Gregory on that bit of pasteboard and Murdock doesn't know Gregory is a crook. Murdock is—at least, I think he is—as innocent as a child just born of all this chicanery. Look at these and then you'll see why."

He unfolded the various papers and memoranda he had brought. The two officials listened to his quiet recital of the entire circumstance, including the bits of conversation, the description of the timid, furtive-looking little woman, which he stressed, with the fact that she was employed by Gregory and not by Murdock, as the head of the firm handled no details.

"Of course," said Warren, "we do not try offenders in the police department. We only try to get evidence that will convict offenders. As against all this record, which Gregory has so carefully prepared, there's nothing to disprove it except Molando's statement and the cores of these bolts of Heir Apparent silk.

"Now, as I look at this evidence of Molando's, as I reason, as Gregory—a guilty man undoubtedly—probably would reason, if I were in Gregory's shoes and arrested for this alleged theft or complicity in it, I'd stand pat on this importation record, on my shipping cases and all the rest of it. Then I'd claim to a jury of twelve men that if there was anything wrong in this transaction this silk was stolen in Japan to fill my cabled order for it. I'd put not one, but twenty reasonable doubts in their minds. Then it would be up to the jury, and I wouldn't worry a bit about their verdict as far as I've gone."

"That's a point Molando hasn't thought of," said Commissioner Roxey, "because he doesn't know what this police department knows."

"You made a reservation—as far as you'd gone," said the commissioner to Warren. "Go all the way, please. What makes you so sure that Gregory is a crook and that Murdock isn't?"

"I'm not sure Murdock isn't, but I think he isn't. I am sure Gregory is," said the young officer. "Here's the dope, Mr. Commissioner. Remember my hunch and my squint at Mike the Maggot?"

"Very well, indeed. Did you prove the hunch correct?"

"Partially. Proved it by Gregory himself. He handled all the details of this purchase, remember, on Murdock's order. I think Gregory is fooling his partner—I found out yesterday he's a junior member of the firm, and not an employee; I found out also that he's been unduly attentive to his partner's daughter and that she resented his attentions; she told me, with her own lips, that she was afraid her father's relations with Gregory were bringing, or might bring, disastrous results; she even asked me as a police officer who had saved her father's life to see what it was, if anything, that made her father esteem Gregory so highly. I learned that this morning."

"What was it?" asked the commissioner.

"One word tells the tale: 'Details.' Murdock leaves all details to Gregory and that's how I nailed him as the crook in this job. I'm ready to bet my life I can prove Gregory did it—although I haven't got all the dope on him yet. Look at this."

He fished out the code cablegram, ordering the silk, from among the other papers.

"Gregory showed me this. He *didn't* show me the reply—and this cablegram calls for a reply—saying the order would be filled. If Gregory was crossing his boss, or his partner, he wouldn't have a reply cablegram. If

he'd had it, he'd have shown it to me. That proves Molando right. Gregory probably had a hand in the job.

"Wait. That isn't all. Here's what I think happened; I can't be sure, of course, but it's what I think. I saw Mike the Maggot at the party at Murdock's house. Mike isn't the kind Murdock's daughter would invite to that party. I didn't tell her I'd seen Mike. I just asked her casually, after she spoke to me about Gregory and his evil influences, whom she had invited. She told me some of Gregory's friends were there—and some of another woman's whom I've met, a nice widow of the gushing type and I can worm out of her, if I have more time, whom she asked and see if Mike the Maggot was among them.

"Now, you see, if Mike was invited as Gregory's friend that proves Gregory is an associate of at least one crook. But I'm going to try to find out how many more. Now, supposing Gregory—whom Murdock trusts implicitly with every detail—had made other uses of the money Murdock thinks was spent to buy this silk abroad," continued Warren, "he'd have to make good this silk in that event.

"So, thinking on these lines, I asked Mr. Murdock when he was showing me around and explaining the details of his business to me, *if he still had this silk.* Mr. Murdock admitted to me, without the slightest hesitation, that he didn't know; that the records would show; then, while we wandered around the warehouse and he explained the system of business, the tricky market, and how he had to watch the prices, leaving all the administrative details to Gregory, *he told Gregory* to have the little old woman in the front office, the Mrs. Mallory I mentioned so particularly, dig up the record and show it —*not to me*—but to Murdock himself."

"Why?" the commissioner of police voiced his first query, not because he doubted Warren, but because of what Inspector Montrose had told him he had already fastened on James Murdock the day before. The inspector had just brought the fourth bullet in, and it was now in the desk on which Warren had laid his own evidence.

"Murdock said that he held the police department in high esteem," went on Warren. "But he wanted to see how nearly his own firm had missed being robbed of this same sort of silk. I didn't ask him to show me the records. I was after Gregory. But when Gregory did show me the records, I nailed him again, Mr. Commissioner, for a dangerous criminal—not with the records, but in another way."

"What way!" said his superior gruffly.

"When I came into the Murdock office, Murdock was out. I was there by appointment with him. The woman who showed me in told me to wait. She ushered me into his private office. Murdock's a keen business man. His office shows it. It's furnished for business, not for illicit operations. It was in scrupulous order. It has the latest devices.

"But I could not reconcile those facts, Mr. Commissioner, with the contradictory fact that this same woman was also once a member of the gang that formerly held out at the Old Mill. It seemed incredible that I should again be looking on 'Velvet Mary' Mallory, the same 'leather-lifter' and 'street-walker' that once knocked down a brother officer of mine when I was a patrolman in the old twenty-second precinct when I worked out of the old West Thirty-Seventh Street station house." [1]

Roger Warren's brief smile flickered and died. His jaw set. He went on.

[1] This precinct has since been consolidated with another.

"Mary Mallory knocked this officer down and deliberately walked up his legs, along the buttons of his blouse, stepped on and off his face and just then I came around the corner and arrested her. She said to me: 'Hello, kid. I prefer your company. You're a nice boy. Yes, I'll tell the world you are. Take me down to Jefferson Market court and I'll pay me fine!'

"I arrested her and took her down, and to my disgust she got off with a fine. Her brother was a member of the Brownie Joe gang at the Old Mill, the same as Mike the Maggot. Now, I'm circling back again. Murdock told me that Gregory had hired this woman, not directly, for he merely said: 'She's been with us ever since Gregory came. Details, always details. There's two hook-ups on Gregory—one definite and complete. The other I've got to ferret out yet—the one about him and Mike the Maggot," concluded the youthful officer.

"You are sure of her identity?" asked the commissioner.

"I am very sure. But I didn't bring in all this stuff," his disdainful hand indicated the mass of papers, "for the reason I gave to Mr. Murdock. I brought it to fool Gregory as to what I was going to ask your permission to do next. I know that Velvet Mary Mallory was finger-printed as a woman of the streets that night in Jefferson Market Court, and dismissed with a fine and a warning, because of her brother's political pull with the Brownie Joe gang. I brought these papers merely to take them to the detective bureau to have the finger-prints she made on them *to-day*—as she handed them to me, one by one, under Gregory's direction—taken off and compared with her old prints.

"Then I'll know if I'm right or wrong about her. And I'll get enough on this Gregory sooner or later—perhaps sooner than later—because I'm playing the social entrée, just as you told me to do. I'll bust into soup-

and-fish clothes or anything to get him. He's my meat if he's the crook I think he is; and if you say so, I'll keep after him and bring this North River silk job back to his door; for with one more good, clean hook-up of Gregory with another felony, any intelligent jury would forget the element of reasonable doubt in this one robbery and soak him good and plenty."

"I approve your idea and I'm glad to see you're on the job, Warren," said the Commissioner. "Keep after Gregory, and keep me posted."

Roger Warren came to attention and his hand snapped to the salute. His face was grim as he swept up the papers and left the two still in conference.

It did not last long. "I rarely give advice to troubled business men, Roxey," said the Commissioner with an acid smile, "but I'm going to make an exception in this matter of Molando's. Ask him if he would care to take a run down to Lakewood and have somebody in his firm, meanwhile, write a courteous letter to the Murdock concern—by the way I see 'per Harry Gregory, Vice-President' is appended to this letter inclosing their bill sent to Molando's concern—and acknowledge delivery of the silk, as per contract. Just add that the president of the Molando Company is out of town and that the matter of the remittance will have his immediate attention on his return. I think that will give Warren enough time."

It was so ordered. Molando readily consented. All of this had happened before eleven o'clock in the forenoon. It was not yet twelve when Warren proved his memory correct by showing the finger-prints of Mrs. Mallory to be identical with those of the all-but forgotten woman who had figured in the once-startling episode of "Velvet Mary."

This underworld sobriquet, by the way, was given the

woman for her eccentricities. She could box like a professional pugilist. She was then in the first flush of her young but sadly perverted womanhood. She could and did don the gloves with her brother's friends and clout them around the squared circle with such ease that it is no wonder that a police officer, ignorant of her prowess, had been struck down while in the act of arresting her for "soliciting."

CHAPTER XXI

A MASTER-STROKE BY THE "MASTER-MIND"

ROGER WARREN immediately phoned James Murdock that he was coming back with the firm's papers. Murdock waited for him. "Velvet Mary" ushered him in and Warren pretended not to notice her at all, save with the courtesy due one so close to the multi-millionaire. He retrieved his receipt and smiled at the man facing him. The smile was for the absent Gregory. Warren knew then that Gregory was yellow.

"Lucky I took these along," said he. "They backed up my statement to the officials of the detective bureau that James Murdock is a business man and not a thief. I thank you, sir."

That was the hardest blow the man facing the detective had ever received. Had he been told he was a thief he would not have winced. He had been one too long. He had his plans too carefully laid to permit even his face to quiver if he were confronted with any accusation, as an instigator, accomplice, or even as the man who had profited—and knew he was nailed red-handed.

Totally unaware of what a tribute he was to receive, he did wince. Instantly, like the consummate actor that

he was, Murdock craftily turned this slight circumstance to his temporary advantage.

He tossed Roger Warren a telegram, signed by one of the Middle Western United States Senators, Overton J. Sylvanus.[1] It was dated at Washington, that morning and had been sent from the Capitol after Warren had first visited this very building.

Run down for a chat as soon as you get a chance.

Warren returned it. United States Senators are not usually found chatting with silk thieves. The circumstance confirmed his own previous estimate of Murdock, heightened by the love he had admitted to his daughter, and also confirmed Warren's previous suspicious appraisal of Gregory.

So did the artful Murdock with his next words. They were quick, sharp, incisive, as became a man of large affairs. They also served to explain his momentary loss of presence of mind, which was more to the point.

"Sergeant," said Murdock, "you saved my life. I'm your debtor for that. So is Audrey. She has mentioned it. She is a great admirer of yours. I never knew her until now to speak so highly of any other man. Now, you just hit me square between the eyes. You didn't know, you see, that I was about to ask of you a favor almost as great as the one you granted me when you saved my life."

Warren was mystified but kept his head. Murdock rose and carefully closed the door.

"This telegram," he jerked his head toward it, "means a good deal to me. The Senator and I were boyhood chums in the Middle West. We've always kept up our

[1] As already stated, and here reiterated, this narrative is fiction, although of a type never before attempted to be portrayed.

friendship. I was privileged to aid him, somewhat, when he began his career. Now he wants to see me. I've got to go down. Here's what worrying me."

Again he paused. Again the young detective was puzzled but not for long.

"I didn't know that ruffian who came into my house the other night," continued Murdock. "Audrey told me the same night that she didn't think he was a burglar at all. She thought he'd come there to kill me. At the time, I told her it was her nerves. She said it wasn't. And the more I've thought it over, the more I've concluded she might be right. The fellow did come there for money. But he may have had another motive, for I never carry much ready money with me.

"I have no idea who this man may have been or his past. I only know he demanded money, cursed me, told me I had money, and I do now recall one thing he said that I couldn't when Inspector Montrose asked me to recite his exact words. Do you remember that?"

Warren nodded.

"This man said: 'Murdock, you've had money, haven't you? You've enjoyed it. The pleasure has been all yours.' That much I can unhesitatingly swear. Yet I have wondered a little how he came to know my name, how he came to creep in on me. Never mind that, except as it has a bearing on what I'm going to say next. In saying it, Sergeant, I'm trusting you as I never trusted any man before—I wouldn't trust Gregory, my partner, with what I'm going to tell you."

"I appreciate what you say, sir."

"Good. Now this doesn't concern me. It concerns Audrey. I cannot take her to Washington with me. It's only a flying trip. Besides, she wouldn't care to go. But, if anyone had malign intentions against me, and someone did, as you know full well, any former associate

of that man you killed might, when I'm gone, possibly jeopardize my daughter's life. Revenge takes curious forms, I've noticed.

"Now you get my drift. I might mention this to Gregory. He's a very capable young man but, between you and me, Gregory wouldn't be where he is to-day, if I hadn't practically taken him from the gutter. I saw the boy had possibilities and I took a chance with him. He has made good. In business, he's a very capable young man. I can trust him without needless oversight.

"Besides, Gregory has enough to do during business hours. Outside of those, he's his own boss. He's like a lot of other rising young men. He isn't the old-fashioned sort that the business man of two or three decades ago was. Few of this generation are. I'm not imputing anything to Gregory, save that in the matter that concerns Audrey, I've got to be extra careful."

He lowered his voice.

"I've told Gregory already that I wouldn't have him for a son-in-law, and I gave him the reasons straight from the shoulder. He's very fond of Audrey, too, but Audrey dislikes him. And I won't have my daughter under even his nominal protection while I'm away. I want to ask if you'll do what you can to look after her. She's been to see your mother. She likes her, as well as you. What do say, my boy?"

Roger Warren unhesitatingly shook hands on it. It did not interfere with his chances of seeing Audrey, it increased them. It was in perfect accord with his latest instruction as a police officer. It was also a master-stroke of genius on the part of the "master-mind" who faced a capable, resolute, intelligent young police officer—and Roger Warren never dreamed his nearness to the "man behind" he had set himself to find and arrest.

He could no more imagine such a thing than Senator

Sylvanus, whose telegram inviting Murdock to Washington was in reply to a letter from Audrey's father. Murdock was approaching the zenith of his long career in "business." Like Alexander, of old, he wept for more worlds to conquer, for a magnificent stroke in crime that would stamp him as great a genius in his chosen avocation as those mighty financiers who project and finance railroads that span the continent, mines that tear mountains apart or any other huge achievement of like magnitude.

Murdock's vanity knew no limit. He could use a Senator as well as a "boob cop" to gratify it and he did.

"Do you suppose you could run down to my country place to-night?" he asked. "I'm going down this afternoon. I'll run back to the city, take the midnight train to Washington, and be home within forty-eight hours at most. We've plenty of room. Mrs. Winthrop will go down to chaperone Audrey."

He added casually that Gregory would probably take dinner with them and that decided Warren to go. He said that he would get permission to leave the city.

Warren called headquarters from outside the office. He remembered that "Velvet Mary" Mallory might listen in from the silk company. He told the commissioner of police what had happened, and the permission was granted.

The commissioner turned to Inspector Montrose, who had returned to his office and was discussing with him the advisability of arresting Murdock forthwith.

"I want to get that gun," said the inspector, "and I think it's in his silk office. But if I do nail him, and it isn't in that office, I may slip up on the proof. What do you think, Mr. Commissioner."

"I think it would be premature to arrest him to-day. Let him go to Washington."

"He may be getting ready to duck. A bird that's as crafty as that might do anything. I don't like to have him out of my sight. He hasn't been out of it so far," he added, grimly; "not since that bullet was found. I've got two men watching him to and from the house, and two more that shadow him when he goes down town. They're covering his silk warehouse right now."

"Send them on the same train to Washington with him," suggested the commissioner. "Warren just told me he's taking the midnight train. Your men can make their reservations this afternoon and be on the train before he boards it. They may even sit in the smoking room with him on the way down and he be none the wiser. One of them might ask him to recommend a hotel and put up with him."

"That's the idea," agreed Inspector Montrose. "I'll wait a bit."

"Master-mind" criminals cannot think of everything, because they must devote so much mental energy to their own plans. The police department was taking a similar course with Murdock's own pet idea in thus doing a little thinking for him.

CHAPTER XXII

CUPID AND THE COP

MURDOCK'S country place on the north shore of Long Island was a charming, spacious villa with ample, well-kept grounds. There were English stables, a few saddle horses, a garage with three machines, a retinue of well-trained servants. The trees were picturesque and ancient, and the late autumn flowers turned their colorful hearts to the warm sunshine as if

they, too, realized that they must make the most of an ephemeral life. In the distance the sea sparkled, and a private pier afforded access to a natty yacht anchored a short distance off shore as well as to a small edifice alongside it housing a motor boat.

Murdock had telephoned that he was bringing down Warren; that Mrs. Winthrop had promised to follow later, and that Gregory would also be with them for dinner. Audrey exulted. She forgot that her father had said he must "take a run down to Washington to see Senator Sylvanus," and even the odious Gregory was now without power to injure her—since Roger would be present. She directed preparation of the luncheon and then dressed for the occasion.

Roger Warren's impression of her as she met him at the door was one that he could never forget. There was an eager but repressed expectancy in her eyes, a sweet familiarity that he had seen before and that set his senses swimming, and his pulses fluttering. Yet her eyes were cool and composed as she kissed her father, and Murdock felt and knew that his girl was changed; that a woman had taken her place, and that another man had or would some day take his place.

"Come right in," said Audrey, "and after you've had a bite of luncheon, I'll show you over the place. Daddy, dear, you must be starved."

"Mr. Warren and I had a busy morning. I asked him to run down and stay here over night. I've got to be away, Audrey, perhaps two days; but he's promised to keep an eye on you. Cut out the wild parties until I get back, will you, dear?"

Murdock tossed her the telegram.

"Oh, I'm cured," laughed Audrey. "No more King-Tutting for me. I'd rather romp with Patrol. It's more fun. He's a great dog."

"He ought to be," grinned her father. "Look who trained him?"

Audrey stole a sidewise look at Roger Warren who was studying a painting to hide his momentary embarrassment.

"How do you like that one?" asked Murdock, genially.

"I'm—I'm not much acquainted with art," stammered the sleuth. "But I should say that it is quite well done."

"You're right. Gregory gave me that for a Christmas present, years ago," said Murdock. "I don't know who painted it, but several people have said it was a masterpiece."

It was a sea scene. Also it answered the description of a painting that had been stolen years before. Roger Warren recalled the fact that he had once carried a description of it, and other valuable works of art, silverware, rugs, bric-a-brac, all of which had been looted from a storage warehouse by bandits who stuck up the watchman and drove off with two vans of loot.

It was another nail in the crime record of Gregory. His hunch was true. Verification was piling up. Then he went for the stroll with Audrey after luncheon.

Along paths, across lawns, with Patrol at their heels, Audrey and Roger wandered, now and again hand in hand, immersed in the bliss which had descended upon them like a benison. It seemed too good to be true, too beautiful to last.

"Isn't this glorious?" she asked shyly, as they came to a secluded spot. "Oh, Roger!"

Her arms were round his neck. Her warm lips were pressed to his, the fragrance of her hair was incense. "You'd never guess what I did this morning in papa's office, because I couldn't kiss you when he was there, and then he took you out and I couldn't anyway."

"Well, what did you kiss?" he bantered.

"Nothing. But I talked to something instead."

"Tell me about it."

"Not now." Her color deepened, her dreamy eyes were shy at the thought of her absurd soliloquy with the pistol in her father's drawer.

They babbled on as lovers have always done and always will do. It was their little hour.

Audrey could see nothing but this athletic young officer, the miracle of his youth untarnished by his years of contact with the base and sordid side of life.

Neither of them saw or heard the approach of Harry Gregory, nor guessed that, as he mounted a tree-crowned knoll of the highway, his glance caught their last embrace. Even Patrol had stolen away as if he knew that his master was now fonder of some one else than his four-footed companion. He was lying morosely, with his head on his extended paws, thinking it out dog fashion.

Then Gregory alighted from his machine, and Patrol thought of other things than his master and the girl who sat by his side over beyond a fringe of trees, oblivious to all the world but each other.

"Yar-ugh-zzh! Waz-yrrh! Zharr-up!" said Patrol to Gregory.

Patrol was a police dog. He knew crooks. He had been trained to know them, and this was his first arrest.

He bounded like a mountain lion toward the astonished junior partner of James Murdock. Gregory didn't know much dog talk, but he had heard the final syllable of Patrol's announcement.

To him it said: *"Up!"* He went up. First to the running board of his coupé, next to the radiator, and then to the low-hanging limb above it which depended from a venerable but most convenient tree. He kept going "up" to Patrol's disgust and to Audrey's glee, as Roger and she came slowly into view.

"Call off that beast!" snarled the man, furiously, "or I'll shoot first and climb down afterward."

"Don't you dare!" defied Audrey. "He's my dog as well as Mr. Warren's—isn't he?" She turned to her lover.

"Come here, Patrol," smiled the detective. His smile made Gregory even more angry, for he interpreted it to mean that Warren rejoiced at his undignified attitude.

Gregory was wrong. The smile was at Roger Warren's latest clew. This fellow carried a gun. There was no permit in the name of this particular Harry Gregory on record at headquarters. Warren had already looked that matter up while waiting for the finger-prints of "Velvet Mary" Mallory to be verified.

Crooks carry guns without permits. Honest men rarely do. Clews in police business are sometimes slight, sometimes they cannot be immediately discerned or verified, but they have a quaint habit, as already said, of disclosing themselves in unexpected places. Warren was wildly in love, but still a cop.

"I wonder why Patrol acted that way, Harry," said Audrey, softly, suddenly remembering her lover's instructions concerning Gregory given her the day before. "He didn't growl at papa, did he, Mr. Warren?"

"He mustn't annoy Mr. Gregory, either. Remember that, Patrol."

Gregory was partially mollified, but not wholly. Patrol sulked. Between "love and duty" he was having what the French term "a bad quarter hour," for even dogs have their little feelings.

Mrs. Winthrop came rolling up in a stately limousine. It was a foreign car, and it fairly shrieked the opulence of its owner. Her chauffeur and footman wore livery.

Warren was charmed to meet Mrs. Winthrop again, for she was a gracious sort of person.

Patrol sniffed and approved her, too. He needed consolation. No cop likes to see an arrest, when he is certain that the officer is right, tossed out of court. Patrol's master hadn't relished one of his earlier "pinches" when Velvet Mary was allowed to leave Jefferson Market Court.

The evening was a merry one, all things considered. The dinner was excellent. The butler was unusually quiet and skillful; and although Roger recognized in him a former forger, not long out of prison, he enjoyed the meal and kept his own counsel. The wisdom of a "social entrée" was becoming more and more apparent. He could never have studied such an odd assortment of continually augmenting clews regarding Gregory on the outside. Murdock casually remarked that his former butler had died, and that several successors had proved inefficient until Gregory had noticed an advertisement about Cobden and thus they had hit on a perfect servitor.

Nor did Murdock think it necessary to mention that Cobden was a "scratcher" of such expertness that Gregory and himself had cooked up a try-out in their business operations which had sent even the Pinkertons far afield, wondering what remnant of the old Knox-Whiteman gang had come into their field of bank customers, sent a messenger boy into a big trust company with an irreproachable check and obtained a certification, thus deftly mulcting a big business house of fifteen thousand dollars, hard won in legitimate channels of business.

The "Pinkies" found the check had passed through Murdock's account. Murdock didn't hesitate to admit it. He admitted that he had sent it to the bank to be certified. "I always take precautions in my business," said he. "I sold this man some silk—a lot of it. Here are the invoices, here are the shipment way bills. When I got his check I wanted to be sure. That's all."

Murdock left to take his midnight train to Washington.

Gregory decided to spend the night in town. Murdock wasn't sorry.

"I don't like that dog," said the junior partner, when they were speeding toward town. Murdock grinned. "Oh, yes—don't tell me that you spoke of 'a dog's life' yesterday," went on the younger man. "I admit you can see ahead. Audrey's infatuated with that young cop."

"And you're jealous," said Murdock quietly. "I don't blame you a bit, but I hold you to your word of honor. That dog will hold you to it if I can't. I thought of that yesterday when I told Audrey she could take him down to the country place. That's that. Forget it.

"I'm getting things lined up for the biggest bit of business that we ever attempted. It's a job that Napoleon might have thought out if he'd been in business to-day instead of dying on St. Helena. Maybe he is reincarnated in me. I don't know. Sometimes I think he is, because I'm tired of all this small-fry stuff. It's just dabbling. Besides, since Gusset tried to gun me the other night, I can see how some things that I thought were dead and buried may crash out of their sepulchres and—well, then I might crash into one.

"Besides, I've got Audrey to think about. I've got plans for her. When I get ready to break off this cop stuff I'll break it off. He's a good boy; he saved my life; he's a thoroughbred—he's the only man that ever dared to tell me to my face that I was honest!"

He leaned back in his plush-padded limousine and roared with laughter. It was such a joke that he had to tell Gregory about it. Murdock wanted to poke fun at them both, and to remind Gregory again, although by inference, that he was a kid in rompers and just getting his eye-teeth cut in the matter of "cops" and their weak points.

Murdock took his train. On the same Pullman where

he had the drawing-room was one of Inspector Montrose's men.

In the Pullman behind was another. Murdock had a cigar and read a newspaper in the smoking compartment. The paper recounted several more crimes of violence and robbery. Murdock knew that one of them was his own crafty planning; that the major part of the loot would soon be in his safe down town. Gregory didn't know that. Murdock never put all his eggs in one basket.

Instead he laid down the paper and mentioned to the man who sat next to him, studying a volume of mathematics, that "New York is getting to be as unsafe for life and property as the Wild West used to be."

The man addressed nodded and laid down his book.

"It's a scandal," he agreed gravely. "The police ought to do something."

"Well, they do the best they can," said Murdock. "We all do. One of them saved my life the other night."

He told the story with much feeling. The other inmates of the smoking compartment were impressed. So was the man who sat next him. He had never seen such a plausible liar in all his life! He was one of Inspector Montrose's men, and he was in the inspector's confidence as well as in that of the commissioner of police. All three of them had once pounded the same beat. They had seen many changes in New York, as well as in their own status in the police department which protects it.

"I only wish the police of every city were as efficient," said Murdock amiably. "I think many police problems in New York arise because criminals from other cities are not detected and apprehended, and they come to New York for the same reason honest people come there. In Washington, for instance, the police are under a sort of a military rule. I doubt if it's as effective as in New

York City, although, of course, there's no comparison between the two cities."

"You know them both?" queried the man with the book.

"Fairly well. I'm on my way to the Capitol to have a chat with a Senator."

"I don't know Washington very well," replied his companion. "Can you recommend a good hotel? I'm an engineer. Got to get back to New York as soon as I can."

"I prefer the Raleigh," said Murdock affably.

"Well, it ought to be good enough for me," smiled the chap, "for you look as if you wanted things comfortable."

"Come along," said Murdock.

The detective did. He was doing Murdock's thinking. but Murdock thought it was the other way around. "Napoleons" are more often found on a tray of French pastry than in criminal life. Murdock was merely a dessert for Inspector Montrose, hungry to connect another and last link to this smug, complacent man that would convict him of murder, and he was hard at work to obtain the pistol that shot Gusset while his prey was scheming his Napoleonic coup.

CHAPTER XXIII

"ARREST HER! SHE'S VELVET MARY!"

"I'M so sorry that Harry Gregory went back with Mr. Murdock," said Edithe Winthrop. "I don't mind telling you, Audrey, that I think Harry's the grandest man!"

Audrey smiled. "Tastes differ about men. Harry has

a brilliant future, apparently. He's daddy's partner. But I can't see Harry any more than you can see Freddy Carrington. And Freddy's wild about you. He told me so at the party."

Mrs. Winthrop smiled. Audrey's words made her own plan seem easier. She knew Gregory was wild about Audrey, wilder, in fact, than Carrington was about herself, and Gregory's determined mien, his look of love at its lowest whenever he glanced toward Audrey, had not gone unnoticed by the gushing widow.

"I was very young when I married Yukon Bill Winthrop, as his friends called my husband," she confessed coyly. "Mother was incurably ill. She had toiled and scraped and starved herself to give me an education. She didn't want me thrown on the world. So when Mr. Winthrop proposed to me, what could I do? We were married. We were happy, in a way.

"Whatever you do, Audrey, *never* marry a man for his money. Mr. Winthrop was an adorable husband. He gave me everything. But love had been torn out of him, frozen out of him, starved out of him in Alaska. He was just 'Yukon Bill,' fifty-eight years old when I married him. He wanted to enjoy life. He died within a year and a half. I'm going to marry again some day, and I'm going to marry the man I love, if I can. That's Harry Gregory. Will you help me?"

"With all my heart," smiled Audrey. "Hush. I think Roger's coming back. He's been out with Patrol —on patrol. Father asked him to sort of look after me until he gets back from Washington. He's been nervous about me ever since that affair the night of the party. Mr. Warren saved papa's life, you know. When the man came into the library to kill him, father's pistol was down in his office. I saw it there to-day when I opened the drawer to his desk to get the new dog collar I bought for

Patrol. And I'm having a jeweler make a new name plate to go on the collar, too!"

She blushed again, remembering her handling of the pistol and her words.

Audrey put her finger to her lips as Roger Warren came into the low-ceilinged living room, with the firelight playing in ruddy sheen against the beamed ceilings and dark paneled walls.

Audrey could hardly refrain from running to him.

"I've put Patrol in his kennel," said he. "He's uneasy. Didn't want to go. But after we toured the grounds, he seemed satisfied. Well, I must run back to town to-morrow. Only got leave of absence for to-night, and that was a special favor from my superior. Too many things cropping up in the department. But Patrol will look after you until your father gets back."

"Must you go?" Audrey's tone was wistful.

"Of course he must, child!" said the tactful and nimble-witted widow. "And so must I. I couldn't languish down here. I should die. Why not run up with me to-morrow and stay at my apartment to-morrow night? We'll go to a dance. I know the loveliest place. The Versailles Supper Club. You remember Mr. LeMar, don't you, Audrey? The young man I met in Paris who was dancing there?"

Roger Warrren was trailing Gregory. Gregory had left the country home. Roger must follow him back to town. It was duty. He had also pledged his word to protect Audrey. So Audrey also came back to town on Warren's promise to dance with her at the Versailles Supper Club that night. Meanwhile she stayed with Mrs. Winthrop, shopping, lunching, going to a matinée.

Warren dutifully reported to the commissioner of police in person. "I've got an engraved invitation to Mike

the Maggot's hangout," said he. He showed it. "Gregory will be there, Mrs. Winthrop says. I'm getting warm. The social entrée, you know."

"Clean them up, if you can, within the next forty-eight hours, or there'll be a blow-off from another source. You don't want the precinct detectives to gum up things and beat the headquarters' men to the wallop, do you? I can tell you they're getting after this gang, red hot."

Warren went home and got into evening clothes. He slipped his shield into his trousers pocket. His pistol was in its holster, and he slipped this into the capacious pocket of his light overcoat. He took the women to the rendezvous in a cab.

Near it he saw a familiar figure in uniform. He stopped the cab, told the women to go ahead, and walked over to speak to Patrolman Sanders.

"Aren't you a little off post? Say, I never got a chance to thank you for the way you backed me up the other night. What kind of a joint is this supper club?"

"Why, you're all lit up!" grinned Sanders. "Nobody'd dream you were a cop. No, I'm on a new post for a day or so. Fact is, the captain and the inspector have a bug in their ear that this club is a sort of glorified 'creep joint.' No blow-offs, not inside of it, but they have it under surveillance. Going in?"

"Yes, for a little dance with some ladies. If you hear anything, romp right through those doors. I don't know that you will, but in case I need you, I'll bust a window or shoot."

"I'll be there," said Sanders, and Warren knew that he would.

He walked on toward the entrance and went within. Edithe and Audrey were nowhere to be seen. A maid told him they would meet him in the foyer. Roger Warren took off his coat and hat and passed them to the

brigand who presided over the checkroom. The chap whisked them away and slipped him a check for the garment. Not until he had turned and was several steps away did Roger remember that his gun was in his overcoat pocket. He started back to get it. The brigand had slipped out of the door in the rear, leaving it open.

Warren was vexed with himself. He was without his pistol. Sanders had hinted that Inspector Montrose was suspicious of this club; Mike the Maggot had invited Edithe Winthrop and her friends to sup and dance here, and Mike, while not Gregory's intimate as Warren had first supposed, but the former dancing instructor of the widow in Paris—was a "bad egg."

He walked back into the main foyer, impatient for Audrey to appear. His apprehension increased until his nerves were as taut as piano wires, his senses as alert as those of Patrol on first scenting and seeing Gregory.

A long scarlet curtain moved. There was no breeze here. Why did it move?

His keen eyes marked that stealthily rippling bit of drapery. He chilled, for himself, at first, for he was human. A man was behind it, and Roger and that concealed figure were the only human beings then in the foyer in sight or out of sight.

His taut brain flew back to his encounter with Gusset, his meeting Gregory, the revelations of Audrey's fears. Gregory knew Warren was coming here, because he was also to meet Mrs. Winthrop at this same place. Had the sleek and sinuous crook, wary as a jackal lest Warren had found scent of his misdeeds, commissioned some humbler vulture to lie in ambush and then slip away, unseen, unhampered, through some hidden exit?

Swifter than light his suspicions hardened. The bravo behind the draperies was waiting. For what?

Then Audrey appeared. A seraph, she seemed, her

girlish frock half concealing, half revealing her figure, her eyes lighting at sight of Roger.

Strains of music, shuffle of feet, subdued murmurs and laughter came from the supper room beyond. The "pop" of a cork within smote Warren's over-strained eardrums like the roar of a weapon.

Again Audrey Murdock's ears heard the pipes of Pan—Pan the deathless, but now with a purity of tone and a certainty of intention. Her starry eyes were for Roger Warren alone, but his set, steadily focused gaze was not for her. If he had been frightened a moment before, he was now downright horrified—not for himself—for her.

Behind that heavy scarlet drapery the concealed figure had taken form. The man there could not see the detective, and again Warren's deduction changed—changed as the hand of the man there again rippled the drapery, this time the outline showing that he gripped a weapon.

The weapon was not pointed at Roger Warren. It was pointed at the edge of the curtain nearest the entrance to the supper room and that edge opened only that way —the weapon commanded the path along which Audrey Murdock must walk to enter that door.

"Come on," said Audrey. "Edithe's going to wait until Harry Gregory gets here. I'm dying to dance with you. I never have, you know."

He beckoned. At his elbow stood a little statue of Hermes.

She changed her course and walked toward him, and, as she came over, mercifully masked from view for an instant by the heavy drapery, the man behind it shifted the point of his pistol.

Roger Warren's hand stole sidewise. He must gain another second of time, since the pistol's muzzle wavered uncertainly behind the curtain, as if the concealed assassin

was undecided whether to wait to shoot or to shoot without delay.

The delay sufficed. Warren grasped the statue and swung it high over Audrey's head, as if to strike her down.

Audrey recoiled, amazed. She was horrified at this sudden change. The face and attitude of the man she loved had become that of a murderous demon.

The arm in which the detective brandished his improvised weapon descended, but the statue flew sidewise, crashing through the street door. His other hand simultaneously swept her behind him, out of range of the hidden bravo—his own intrepid bulk protecting her.

The crash of the statuette against the door filled the silent foyer with its reverberation. It crashed to the street outside, where Patrolman Sanders, alert for some signal, was idling near the entrance. The smash of the riven glass, the tinier tinkle of the fragments to the stone steps, also roused the liveried attendant within the supper room.

He leaped outward just as Patrolman Sanders, blowing his whistle, leaped in.

The open door revealed the patrolman to the throng inside the supper room. Sight of his blue uniform, the gilded buttons, the gleaming shield of the department sparkling on breast and cap, his determined face, the club that hung by a thong at his wrist, the police pistol in his hand—all these symbolized the guardianship of the law.

The guests who saw Sanders and the two figures in evening garb like their own beyond, were stunned in their first panic at this unwonted entrance, but that died and became a curiosity as enormous, when Roger Warren's voice rang out a cold command:

"Arrest this woman!" said he, pointing to Audrey, as

the pistol behind the curtain wavered and dropped, but leaped into a new rigidity as Sanders gripped the girl's bare arm and propelled her again into view.

Warren covered her, as before, with his own body.

"Lock her up. Charge her with murder. She's Velvet Mary Mallory. Her record is down town. Tell Inspector Montrose it's Warren's orders—Warren from headquarters—here's my shield. Out with her! *Quick!*"

The crowd of diners and dancers surged forth through the doors in a human tidal wave.

A clatter of tongues, low murmurs, high-pitched nasal tones, the excited comment of those who had seen this "pinch" swelled and rose.

Alert and as swift as distance would permit, two patrolmen who had answered the signal from Sanders's whistle stormed through the street door and up the foyer at sight of Roger Warren's shield and his swift, all-inclusive gesture at the gaping spectators.

"Keep them back! They're not wanted!" said he.

Then he leaped for the man behind the scarlet curtain. The fellow was gone.

As Warren swept it aside he saw a narrow hall. He could hear the swift patter of the fellow's feet as he ran, already around the angle of this masked corridor just beyond.

Roger Warren did not follow. He dropped the curtain, whirled, and dashed for the cloak room past the crowd of diners and dancers, now being herded back into the supper room by the two patrolmen and the attendants.

He caught just one glimpse of Audrey's face and his heart fell into ashes at the poignant despair, the eyes of horror, as Sanders dragged her through the shattered door and out into the night.

The hat and coat brigand was in his coop again. He was breathing hard as Warren shoved him his check. He

could not see the fellow's face at first; he could see only Audrey's. Would he ever see anything else but her last look of sorrow verging into agony unutterable and love for him, dwindling and dying into supplication more unutterable?

He seized his coat, fumbling in the side pocket for his pistol. It was not there.

The man behind the shelf leered and plucked the pistol from the floor at his feet.

His next words saved the fellow's own life and Roger Warren's tottering reason. The detective fancied for an instant that he was looking into the face of the same man he had shot in Murdock's home, barely forty-eight hours before.

"Velvet Mary! Ha, ha, ha!" The maniacal laugh was smothered, but it was no less awful. "Say, Mr. Warren, even the old-time gals can't fool you, can they? You were dead right. That *was* Velvet Mary. I knowed her well. Remember me?" he went on in a sepulchral whisper.

Warren stared. His stifled suffering racked his brain no less than his heart.

"Why, I'm Benny Smart!" half whispered the other. "I was Velvet Mary's sweetheart when I drove a cab over on Seventh Avenue, in the good old days. She thinks she's one of the aristocrats, now. Ha, ha, ha! She's living with this guy, Murdock. You know him. And he's a crook, the king pin of 'em all. So's she.

"I seen her when she come in to-night, and she never give me a tumble. What d'ye know about that? And this other silk-hat toff, as English 'Arry used to call 'em—Gregory, Murdock's partner, he's a crook, too. And Mike the Maggot—all the old mob from the Old Mill—say, I kin tell you a lot about them. All crooks, along with Velvet Mary! Ha, ha, ha! Even she couldn't fool

you—no, sir, you grabbed her once; remember the time she knocked down that harness bull on Seventh Avenue and Thirty-Seventh Street and walked on him?"

He glanced around. "Gregory's due here. He's with a gal to-night. He's after her ice.[1] Say, grab yourself a benzine buggy. On yer way. Outa the front door. If Gregory ever sees you, a cop, talkin' to me, you'll never get out alive, nor will I. I'll lam outa de servants' entrance and grab anodder benzine buggy. Meet me—"

He hissed a word into the officer's ear and was gone.

Roger Warren gripped his gun and walked out. Gregory was just coming down the street. He did not see the detective until the latter was pulling down the curtain. Then he bowed stiffly and walked in, looking at the broken door. Warren sped away. He wanted Gregory to think Audrey had left with him. Sanders had taken her to the nearest police box and the wagon had escorted her, amid a jeering, wondering throng, to the station house.

He could not follow her, just yet, to explain that her arrest, his threat to strike her down, was all a ruse to save her from being shot down by "Ha! Ha! Benny" Smart from behind that scarlet curtain. He must leave her for a few moments to unmerited custody, but her life would be safe, and when he had seen and talked with this semimaniac, who had menaced the life of the girl he held precious above all other lives, he could follow, release her and explain this frightful necessity and his own more frightful accusation against her of murder.

It was too weird for belief, too horribly, ironically true for doubt. He remembered, now, as he drove fast to the rendezvous Benny Smart had named, that Benny was a half-brother to "Satchel" Gusset, the man Warren had killed in Murdock's house.

Benny would be there. He must be there. He must

[1] Meaning her diamonds.

run out this newest and hottest clew on Gregory and Mike the Maggot. His hunch had been correct.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE METHODS OF MONTROSE

THE police officer, pursuing clues, does not see the complete chain of evidence; he only sees here and there a circumstance, which, when added to or taken from some other set of circumstances bears the legal test; and he must then procure the next link to make his chain of sufficient strength to stand the test of an arrest, an indictment, and a trial.

That was the task to which Inspector Montrose set himself on discovering the minute but still discernible difference in one of the three bullets taken from Satchel Gusset's corpse.

The morning of the day that Roger Warren made his investigation into the Murdock Silk Company, which was the second morning after Audrey's wild party and Gusset's death, the inspector had two links of his needed chain to justify an arrest, indictment, trial, and—perhaps—a conviction of James Murdock for murder.

One of these links was the three bullets taken from the corpse, two of which were of the same .32-caliber from the standard police arm carried by Roger Warren; the other was the .320-caliber bullet. Roger had fired three times, and three bullets were taken from the man he had killed; two more bullets were pried from the wall in the end of the hall which Gusset had fired and both of these were .38-caliber bullets and fitted the weapon found in the dead man's hand.

Another of these two links of evidence was the fourth

bullet, found as told in the debris collected from the Murdock mansion. This was the bullet from Roger Warren's pistol which had not struck Gusset, as the latter, lying prone on the floor and partially behind the large chair, was firing at the young detective who was then out in the hall.

These two links of evidence in possession of Inspector Montrose were vital to the chain, but the chain needed at least three other links to make it strong enough to bear the weight of a reasonable doubt.

These three needed links were: (1) If four shots were fired, why did Warren's report mention but three, since he was present and fired first? (2) If Murdock had a weapon and fired the fourth shot from that weapon, carrying the .320-caliber bullet, where was that weapon and how could it be procured? (3) What was the motive that impelled James Murdock to shoot down Satchel Gusset, when and while a police officer was already firing at him?

If Murdock had not lied, if he had not concealed his weapon at the time of the shooting, if he had not removed it from the house after the shooting, the chances are that no suspicion would ever have been attached to him.

All Murdock needed to have done, when asked that first question by Roger Warren: "Do you know this man?" would have been to say "Yes," instead of "No." If he had said "Yes," and had added that he knew Gusset years before and that Gusset and he had once had "business dealings" and that Gusset had vowed vengeance on him, the mere fact that Gusset had since been a convicted felon and had served a prison sentence would probably have been enough to have exonerated this wealthy and apparently irreproachable business man from all taint of criminality.

If the fourth bullet had actually disclosed that Murdock —and not Warren—had fired the shot which Police Surgeon Dell said was the cause of death, under those circumstances Roger Warren would not have been arraigned; he would, instead, have been an important witness for Murdock, whom the police would have then arrested on the same technical charge of "homicide"; Murdock would have been arraigned, as Warren was arraigned, exonerated, beyond doubt, because of Gusset's known record as a criminal plus Warren's testimony of what was happening when he arrived. And *then* James Murdock would have had what he already thought he had, when he started for Washington, to continue planning the last steps of the most amazing crime he had ever plotted in his long and devious career.

Murdock, with all his craft, did not see that far.

Murdock lied. He lied to Detective Sergeant Warren, he lied to Inspector Montrose.

Murdock lied because he felt he had to lie; he felt that to acknowledge he knew Gusset was equivalent to admitting some knowledge of, or some complicity in, that man's previous criminal career.

Murdock didn't dare to do other than lie, because he knew that he had known Gusset; and although he alone had heard Gusset's last ironic words, although he knew that no one but Gusset could actually testify they had ever met—he lied in the presence of the man he had killed because he was afraid!

Inspector Montrose was after his next needed link of evidence. He reasoned simply but infallibly: "If Warren didn't hear Murdock shoot, and Warren's report doesn't mention Murdock doing any shooting, then Murdock, whom the police records show has a permit for a pistol, had a silencer on it."

The killing of Gusset had taken place in Inspector

Montrose's district. The warehouse and office of the silk business carried on by Murdock were in another police inspection district and in another police precinct. Any police officer, however, when in pursuit of a suspected felon, may go anywhere, provided he notifies his superiors.

When the Commissioner of Police received the message from Roger Warren that he was going to trail "Gregory" by going down to the Murdock country place and that Murdock and Gregory would both be there that afternoon, the commissioner, in turn, since he had been so lately in conference with Inspector Montrose regarding the slippery Murdock, conveyed that information to him by telephone to his headquarters in the Third Inspection District.

"That gun," said Inspector Montrose to the Commissioner, after getting the information, "is either at Murdock's home on Fifth Avenue or at his silk office. I think it's at the silk office. First, because Murdock hasn't been to either of his other offices, since Gusset was killed, according to Detective Lieutenant Dean and Detective Daniels, who have been keeping close tabs on him. They're getting ready to go to Washington. I've got one other man to send ahead of Murdock and another to follow him when he starts down on Long Island. I think I'll go after that gun, myself. Is it O. K.?"

"O. K. to be sure!" replied the commissioner.

The Inspector was in plain clothes when he came into the Murdock office. Mrs. Mary Mallory was there. The inspector didn't know her. He was entirely ignorant of the fact that she was the once notorious Velvet Mary or that her fingerprints were already down town. Mary had been living decently for almost twelve years. The good old days were gone. The gangs were broken up. Their political pull was gone. Mary had married a former cab-driver, they had a tiny apartment in a section

of New York almost as forgotten as the good old days, a little south and west of the present Greenwich Village.

Inspector Montrose inquired for Mr. Murdock.

"He's gone down to his country place for the afternoon," said the timid, furtive-looking little woman.

This was a promising beginning. The woman had told the truth.

"Is Mr. Gregory about?"

"No, sir. I think he went down with Mr. Murdock, too."

Inspector Montrose knew this was also true. He smiled. He could smile kindly or—unkindly. Mrs. Mallory (as she was known to the firm) was reassured. This was a kindly gentleman.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" she asked politely.

"The fact is, I'm looking for a man with a gun," he said with a smile. "I was told he brought it in here. I wanted to ask Mr. Murdock if he had seen such a man. I'm Inspector Montrose of the New York Police Department."

He displayed his shield.

"Did you see a man around this office with a gun? You see, a man tried to shoot Mr. Murdock the other night, up in my district. Maybe somebody else is after him again. That's why I dropped in here to look around."

It was all quite true. Also, as said before, the Inspector had a sense of humor and it saved the situation, although he himself was the only man that was then after Murdock. Warren was after Gregory.

"No, sir," said Velvet Mary, vastly relieved, "I didn't see a man with a gun around here, but I did see a woman with one."

"When?"

"This forenoon, sir."

"What was she doing with it?"

"She was putting it in a drawer in Mr. Murdock's desk, sir."

The wise veteran of the police department "stalled." He shook his head. His smile was a sad one, the smile of a disappointed man!

"Was Mr. Murdock around at the time?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. He was downstairs with another police officer—a detective by the name of Warren. They were going over the silks, sir, to see if the firm had bought any stolen goods."

Again, Montrose was impressed. Her candor was unfeigned, and he had now three separate and distinct proofs that the woman was on the level.

"I hardly think," said he, "that this woman would want to shoot Mr. Murdock, for, if she did, she would probably have shot at him then, wouldn't she? Do you know her?"

"Yes, sir, I know her. No, she wouldn't want to shoot Mr. Murdock. She's his daughter, sir."

"You are quite right. But if she was handling a pistol, it might be that she was afraid some one else would shoot him—you see, some one did try to kill him only night before last. And his daughter was there at the time. She was giving a party. I wonder what she was doing with the pistol? I don't suppose you know, do you?"

He noted the sudden livid flame in this woman's eyes. It was curious.

"I seen her smiling at it, and I thought she was whispering something to it, sir. Anyway, she acted queer—that is, to me. I never see her act so queer before in all the time I've worked here."

"And how long is that?"

"A little over five years, sir."

He asked her duties. She told him. He asked where she lived. She gave the address, street number and apartment number. He asked how she came to notice the girl with the pistol.

"I was putting back some of the firm's records," said the woman, walking over to the file, "which I had taken out of here. Detective Warren afterward took some of them to headquarters. I had to put some slips in the files to show where these papers had gone. You can see from here, sir, that when the door to the private office is a little open, I can see the end of Mr. Murdock's desk."

Inspector Montrose walked to the spot and looked where she pointed.

"The door is closed now," said he. "I can't see what you saw."

"I'll open it. I have a key to the room."

Suiting the action to the word, she opened the door and pointed again.

"You're right," said the inspector. "Now, while it may be of no particular importance at all, again it may be of a great deal of importance. I mean this pistol and this girl. You say she was whispering to it?"

"And smiling at it," said she with positiveness. "I just happened to get a glimpse of her, and she acted so queer I came over to the crack of the door and kept on looking until she put it back in the drawer."

"Perhaps her father wanted her to bring him the pitsol to take down in the country, where you said he'd gone. Somebody's hard after him, you know." He smiled again.

She shook her head. "No, he didn't take it. It's in the drawer right now. I locked the drawer myself after he went away, but while I saw it, and the doo-dad on the end of it, I didn't touch it."

"Suppose we have a look at it?"

Mary opened the drawer. Murdock's lie had borne another useful link of evidence.

"I'm going to have a chat with Mr. Murdock in a day or so," said Montrose. "I think I'll take this pistol with me. He has a permit for it. Will you be guided by me and say nothing about my visit?"

"Yes, sir."

"I've got to protect Mr. Murdock against another possible attempt on his life," said he genially. "Just say nothing to any one or to him about my call. I'll explain it all to him myself, and I won't forget to put in a good word for a capable little woman like yourself, either."

"I'll keep mum," said Mary. "I promise you not to peep. If I can do anything else for you, sir—"

"Perhaps you may later on. We never know when we need help. Mr. Murdock needed it, and needed it pretty badly only night before last. Good afternoon."

CHAPTER XXV

THE "MASTER-MIND" MOVES SWIFTLY

"THE Raleigh!" said James Murdock to an obsequious taxi starter as he crossed his palm with a tip. "Come along, old man. I don't think I got your name in our chat last night."

"Dean is my name. I'm an engineer. And yours?"

"I'm Jim Murdock. Silk business in New York. Well, it don't cost any more for two than for one. Expect to be here long, Mr. Dean?"

They were whirling away, and Detective Daniels, hav-

ing heard their destination, ambled toward a street car. He would overtake them at the hotel.

"Can't say, Mr. Murdock. I'm on a big deal. It all depends on what the other fellows do. And I don't know what they'll do, you see. Got to try and keep in step—and may flunk."

Daniels came into the lobby, refusing a bell-hop's solicitous grab for his bag, personifying the miserly traveler, just as Murdock and Dean headed for the breakfast room. Daniels got a room. He took his bag up himself and then came down. He dodged out, sent a telegram to Inspector Montrose, which meant nothing to the transmitter and much to its receiver. Daniels next ate a frugal, hurried breakfast at a near-by lunch counter. Then he went back to the hotel and buried his face in a newspaper in the lobby where he could watch his "buddy" and Murdock.

They emerged and took a cab for the capitol. When they had gone, Daniels took the street car on Pennsylvania Avenue for the same place. Murdock had gone inside. Dean awaited his partner's arrival on the steps outside.

"I wired the inspector that everything was O. K. and you had him in tow," growled Daniels.

"Good. Now you pipe him off. I've got to keep out of sight. Here he comes."

Dean dodged behind a convenient pillar out of view. Daniels walked past Murdock, still intent on his paper—apparently. He saw Murdock walking toward the Senate office building. He watched and saw him meet and return with a stately gentleman. They were in animated conversation, and each was smiling.

"Who is that distinguished looking man?" queried Daniels of an attendant in the Capitol rotunda.

"That's Senator Sylvanus. Big man. Member of Finance Committee," said the man addressed.

"Thanks I knew he was somebody pretty big," said Daniels as the private elevator to the Senate Chamber whisked his quarry out of sight.

The Senate convened at noon, and before that time Sylvanus and Murdock reappeared. Daniels had again "switched" with his partner, and it was Dean who was now peering hither and yon, apparently trying to catch sight of some one else, when he came face to face with Murdock.

"Oh, hello!" said Murdock. "How you making out?"

"Trying to find my man," said Dean, with a mixture of guile and candor fully on a par with Murdock's own. "Say, this is a magnificent place!"

"Meet Senator Sylvanus," said Murdock. "Boyhood friend of mine. Senator, this is Mr. Dean, New York engineer, down here on business. Ran into him on the train last night."

It was all a part of Murdock's perpetual "alibi." Had Dean and Daniels not been so well posted by Inspector Montrose, each might have felt that Murdock was perhaps the object of unmerited suspicion, for there is a wide gulf between a half-starved house-breaker and a United States Senator.

Senator Sylvanus exchanged brief amenities with Mr. Dean, and then Murdock and he walked over to the Senate Office building again, with Daniels discreetly trailing them from afar. Into that building Daniels did not go. Strangers are accosted by guards if they loiter in corridors, and Daniels didn't want to make explanations to guards or to the capitol police, for his instructions were simply to keep Murdock in view at all times, and to keep in touch with the inspector and to follow Murdock back to New York, if he returned soon.

This was the same morning that Audrey, Roger and Edithe Winthrop returned to New York from Murdock's

country home, leaving Patrol much desolated and in an improvised kennel.

In the private office of Senator Sylvanus, Murdock and he lighted cigars.

"Well, Jim, you carry your years well," said the other.

"Now, about this foreign loan to China. It's gone through. The committee has recommended it, the caucus has decided to push it across, and it will have executive approval. I got it straight from the Foreign Affairs Committee at the Senate just now."

"Thanks, Senator. What rate of interest will it carry?"

"It will net about seven per cent. But the trouble is, Jim, it's going to be heavily oversubscribed. Of course, if you want to shift those Liberty bonds and other securities that you have in my bank, and could get in on this Chinese loan, you'd have practically the same security from Uncle Sam and you'd pull down a nice rate of increased interest. But I don't know just how it can be managed."

Murdock carried a large amount of securities in the bank Sylvanus owned in the Middle West. It was in his boyhood home. It was also far removed from too-inquisitive metropolitan bankers whose suspicious clerks sometimes spy out stolen securities. Murdock didn't sell the bonds he occasionally bought or those he procured that were frequently stolen. He kept his "alibi" intact by "washing" a check in and out of a bank to pay for the stolen bonds. He sent a trusted messenger to draw the cash from his real estate and insurance office. He took a receipt from the middle-man who was disposing of the stolen securities. This check always called for the amount of the bonds at current market value. It was to the order of the middle-man, he endorsed it, but he got only a fraction of the face of the check.

The messenger returned the balance of the cash to Murdock. He already had the stolen bonds. The messenger had a choice of returning the money or not. The alternative to not returning it was a swift but anonymous denunciation to the police for the twin crimes of murder and robbery. The messenger preferred not to be denounced, for he knew Murdock had indisputable proof of both crimes and could convict him with a word. Besides, he was well paid.

By such means as this the number of "gilt-edge" securities to Murdock's credit in the bank of which Senator Owen J. Sylvanus was president was augmented from time to time. They had been friends for many years. Murdock sought and obtained financial advice from the Senator. That was his ostensible errand in Washington.

His real errand was to ferret out some final facts to perfect the gigantic crime he had planned with painstaking care, with all other details already worked out to the uttermost.

He was working on this now as he faced the Senator and nodded. He didn't want a penny of the Chinese loan. He wanted information as to the transfer of the securities, and if it would be a "bankers' credit" as is sometimes done, or in the hard, glittering bars of gold bullion, put up in neat strong kegs for shipment overseas, as is sometimes done, when coinage is needed in foreign lands to "stabilize" the country's affairs.

Murdock leaned back in his chair and looked out of the window as the Senator talked. He saw a man walking up the street. Ten minutes later he saw him walking back down the street.

It was the same man who had come into the lobby of the hotel while Dean and himself had gone in to have breakfast. Murdock looked at the man a third time, and concluded he was "a cop." Then he remembered he had

seen a similar-looking man pass him on the train's arrival.

He knew then that he was being "shadowed." He did not know why, nor did he care. Daniels walked away. Murdock grinned.

"Tell you what I'll do, Senator," said he at last. "If you'll give me a letter of introduction to the proper treasury official, I'll go down and have a chat with him. I'll try and eel in on this, somehow. I want to get in, if I can, before the public subscription to the loan is announced."

Senator Sylvanus wrote the letter. He took Murdock through the tunnel between the Senate Office building and the Capitol. Murdock had never seen it. Only Senators use it, and their close friends when accompanied by Senators. A little trolley runs between the two buildings underground. Murdock emerged, drove to his hotel, paid his bill, paid for and asked to have transportation ready on his return so that he could take the fast limited train at 3 o'clock that afteroon to New York.

Dean and Daniels lost much time "frisking" the Capitol for him. Daniels had no idea that Murdock had left the Senate office building until Dean went in to inquire for him.

At the hotel, however, they picked up his trail again. That was what Murdock wanted them to do. He was now thinking for them. He didn't fear them. He was simply busy and didn't want to be annoyed by cops until he had everything in shape for a killing that would startle the world.

Before presenting his letter to the treasury official, Murdock called the hotel on the phone, and directed that his bag be sent to the station in charge of a porter, and that the porter meet him at the station where the incoming cabs arrive at three o'clock that afternoon.

"I'll just have time to catch the train," said he. "If

any one asks for me, tell them I'm going back to New York on it. I expect a gentleman may ask for me. Tell him I can't see him, but if the matter is important to take the same train and we'll chat on the way back to New York."

He was still thinking for the unknown cop he had spotted, and he began to suspect dimly that "Mr. Dean" was engineering some other sort of business than technical engineers usually engage in. Murdock grinned. He liked to tie cops to a post. He had tied Warren. He would tie one or both this pair of boobs—for they probably hunted in pairs, as cops do.

He went to the treasury official, presented his letter of introduction, was passed from hand to hand until he reached the proper assistant subordinate—walking down the official red tape with utmost composure—and finally met the last human link in the chain at Washington.

He chatted with this official, told of his dilemma, of the chat he had with Senator Sylvanus, and deftly piloted the conversation into the means and methods by which shipments of gold from government sub-treasuries are made to vessels which take charge of the bullion in their strong rooms to go overseas.

He didn't bother about exact transfer dates; he would get that detail in New York from another "handy man" in the bank where he kept his account. This man was not a dishonest man—intentionally. He was merely one of many keen, shrewd, capable chaps to whom "high finance" is a hobby and with whom living is a problem. His salary was fair, but his necessities exceeded his income. So he served James Murdock as a "confidential clerk" on the side, evenings generally, and Murdock wormed from him —and paid him a bonus—for "inside stuff."

Dean and Daniels, wondering where he had gone, were

secretly pleased to learn that Mr. Murdock was returning to New York on a limited train, and had left word for some one he expected to meet him "on the train," because of the shortness of time.

The train was all Pullmans. The detectives procured their tickets, and while Daniels ensconced himself in the rear, Dean hid out up far in front. Murdock arrived just as the train was about to leave. Daniels saw him striding through the station toward the gate, bag in hand. They hastily boarded the train.

Murdock turned and bolted for the entrance unseen. He caught another cab and drove down town. There he hired another automobile and was driven to Baltimore. He reached that city and a convenient wharf, far from the railway station, after the two angry detectives alighted and sent a wire to Inspector Montrose, which threw that gentleman into a genuine "hell's bells" mood.

Murdock's "master mind" was still master of the situation—so he told himself—when he stepped on the midnight boat for New York City. Dean and Daniels were still combing the Capitol for him, now with the aid of the Washington police, with whom Inspector Montrose promptly got into long-distance telephonic communication.

Their quest was vain. Murdock was sleeping soundly in a stateroom on the night line from Baltimore to New York when Roger Warren sent the little image of Hermes crashing through the door of the Versailles Supper Club—a vulture's nest owned by Murdock himself—and cried out to Patrolman Sanders: "Arrest this woman!"

Edithe Winthrop, waiting for Harry Gregory's arrival, didn't see this crisis in the lives of the newly betrothed lovers; Gregory, arriving afterward, did not know it had happened, for Patrolman Sanders was now entering the station house with his prisoner—and another one.

CHAPTER XXVI

KING TUT ON THE WARPATH

DUMB and numb with amazement, shocked beyond belief in the evidence of her own senses, Audrey Murdock submitted to the strong grasp of the wondering patrolman and walked without hat or wrap around the corner to the police box where Sanders summoned the patrol wagon.

Roger Warren's arrest was a ruse to save Audrey Murdock's life, the only possible expedient by which he could save her from death before his own eyes, and, as it quickly proved, from death by shooting by his own pistol.

Audrey did not know that. She only knew that she had been arrested; that the wonderful young man who had vowed his love and kissed her lips, had changed so astoundingly and so incredibly before her startled gaze that his love for her was surely false.

Warren had not followed her to the police station. He could not. His duty as a police officer first called for apprehension of that veiled, but murderously sinister individual outlined behind the scarlet curtain. His effort to then and there apprehend the baffled would-be assassin failed, as said.

Audrey, crushed under the weight of this double shock to her mind and her heart, was so utterly lost to external circumstances that she did not see Freddy Carrington, now again most royally drunk, steering a zig-zag course toward her and Patrolman Sanders through the crowd.

"Get outa m' way!" said Carrington, who was in evening attire. The spectators made room.

He walked straight up to Patrolman Sanders. He saw Audrey Murdock. She was a "good little pal." Freddy's brain was entirely unable to cope with this startling situation, but he remembered that he was "King Tut" and that "Cleopatra" was in distress. He remarked:

"Good evening, offisher! What's the bally row?"

"On your way!" said Sanders sternly.

"Just a minute, offisher! Surprished at you. We've met before. Night before lasht. Don't you remember 'King Tut?' What zshou doin' wish 'Cleopatra?' Frien' of mine. Good little pal. Bad form, offisher, very bad form to keep a queen standin' out here without a wrap. Allow me!"

Without waiting to be allowed King Tut gracefully draped his overcoat over Audrey's bare shoulders. Mechanically, she drew it closer around her. She did not see Carrington, she did not hear his voice.

"Now, whatzh big idea!" demanded Carrington. "I'm King Tut. I gotta know whatzh going on in Egypt!"

The crowd tittered. Sanders glared.

"On your way," said he, "as I told you before, or I'll lock you up for interfering with an officer. You hear me?"

"Zshure, I hear you. Ain't we both in Egypt? Say, offisher—do me a favor, will you? Tell me if you've seen Lord Carnarvon or Aphrodite. I'm looking for zhem. Aphrodite's maid told me that she wazsh goin' to meet Carnarvon. I wanta meet him, too. I'll give him worse'n beetle bites—I'll fix him so he'll go into Pyramid and szhleep there. I wanta see Carnarvon. I wanta szhoot him down. Un'erstand?"

The clang of the patrol rang out. The crowd on the pavement parted as it drew up. Sanders quickly transferred Audrey Murdock to the officer on the rear of the

wagon and whispered a few words. Then his hand reached out and grasped King Tut by the collar and passed him along, too.

With another prolonged clangor of its bell, the patrol wagon shot up the street, turned a corner, and made for the East Sixty-Seventh Street station house where Inspector Montrose was now in conference with Captain Marsh, and their two minds were trying to deduce where James Murdock had probably disappeared and whither he was bound.

They were closeted in the inspector's private office when the clang of the arriving patrol, surrounded by a fresh throng of morbidly curious spectators and by the alert police district reporters disgorged its unwonted cargo of two prisoners, a man and a woman, both in fashionable evening attire.

A moment later Inspector Montrose was summoned. Audrey was now on the verge of total collapse and a matron was hurriedly summoned to aid her. She was taken, by the inspector's orders, into Captain Marsh's private office, while he conferred with the man who had taken Audrey into custody from Patrolman Sanders.

"Who is she? What's the charge?"

"Sanders told me she's Roger Warren's prisoner. Her name is Velvet Mary Mallory. Old-timer. Record down town. Charge, murder! Sanders says she was in the Murdock house the other evening. You were there, Inspector!"

"All right. Who's this other fellow?"

"King Tut. Sanders arrested him for being drunk and interfering with arrest of woman. Called her Queen Cleopatra."

Inspector Montrose and Captain Marsh walked over toward the young man.

Carrington was leaning against the desk behind which

sat the lieutenant in charge of the station. The waiting reporters crept closer. Here was a "real story."

"What's your name?" demanded the inspector.

"I'm King Tut-ankh-amen! Zhust outa Pyramid. Been asleep six zshousand years. Where's Lord Carnarvon? I wanta kill him. He stole my Aphrodite."

The laughter was tremendous. Mixing mythology and mixing drinks do not often show their curious effects in straight police business. The scribbling scribes were pleased.

"Oh, you want to kill him, eh?" Inspector Montrose asked grimly. The fellow had been in Murdock's house when Gusset was killed. "What are you going to kill him with? By blowing your breath in his face?"

"Well, you dear daffy-down-dilly!" managed King Tut, without a mixed syllable. "Zhe beetle bit him. The beetle didn't poiszhon him. He poiszhoned the beetle. I gotta kill him wizsh a gun. Reg'lar gun."

He felt his pockets solemnly. His face took on the look of an ardent but chagrined disciple of Bacchus.

"Wherzh my gun?" demanded King Tut. "It ain't here. I had it. Lend me yourzh. I gotta kill Lord Carnarvan. He stole Aphrodite. I'd kill anybody—"

The officers pounced on him at the signal from Inspector Montrose. They deftly frisked the struggling monarch. There was no gun. They deposited his other personal possessions on the desk.

"Wherzh my royal robszh!" demanded King Tut, with owlish gravity. "Gotta go back in zhe Pyramid, eh? Gotta get zsheep. Aw' ri'. I'll get Lord Carnarvon. I'll get Aphrodi—"

He was still threatening Harry Gregory while they led him back to sleeping quarters not so ancient as those of the Pyramids but quite as secure.

Another officer went to retrieve the coat. He brought

it back. In the side pocket was a delicate little pistol, silver-mounted, pearl-handle, .22-caliber.

"Book him as King Tut," curtly directed Inspector Montrose. "Charge him with being drunk and disorderly, interfering with an officer, trying to release arrested prisoner, with threatening to kill a man and with violation of the Sullivan law. I guess that will hold this merry little monarch until to-morrow morning, anyway."

"Who is the woman prisoner, Inspector?" asked a gray-haired police reporter.

"Velvet Mary!" he snapped. "Oldtimer. Charge, murder."

"Velvet Mary!" gasped the scribe as inspector and captain vanished. "Holy smoke. One of the Old Mill gang. I thought Mary was dead and buried, long before this." He faced the battery of eyes of less experienced reporters. "This is a hot one! Mary must have been sleeping in the same pyramid with King Tut for the past twelve years. She looks like a queen, too! Wonder who that other guy is? How did he and Mary ever come to hook-up?"

He danced for a phone booth and began to chat rapidly with a "re-write" man in the editorial office of his newspaper. The hour was late. The paper must soon go to press. This veteran police reporter had an inside story—a story that swung back to the good old days, when Mike the Maggot and the Brownie Joe gang were in full control of more than a few human destinies, lives, property, and sometimes of what then passed current for justice.

It was far different, now. The difference made the story one that would be eagerly read and the two reporters saw to it that it was a good story and the editor that it had a prominent place in the paper about to be born with the day's dawn.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE LONE GRAB

ROGER WARREN'S flight in the cab from the Versailles Supper Club to keep his impromptu rendezvous with "Ha! Ha! Benny" Smart began with a swift satisfaction at saving Audrey Murdock's life and a swifter disquiet that he could not follow her immediately to the East Sixty-Seventh Street police station, release her, and explain why he had been forced to make this his alternative.

Although he knew what had happened, although what had happened was due to his own orders and police authority, yet he had the sensation that his soul had been wrenched violently from his body. He swung from nightmare back to wakefulness and then time and space would vanish again in a fresh halucination.

He leaped out of the taxi and ran down into the basement of the triangular building that stands at the northerly intersection of Forty-Second Street, where it is crossed by Broadway and Seventh Avenues. In a trice he was in a phone booth.

He called the East Sixty-Seventh Street police station through police headquarters.

"Roger Warren speaking; detective sergeant on special detail from the commissioner of police, working from headquarters." His voice was crisp. "I've just sent in a prisoner, Velvet Mary. Take her into Inspector Montrose's room. Don't put her in a cell. Tell the inspector I'll communicate with him as soon as I can. Can't stop, now. Book her for murder, and do not let any one get near her."

"O. K., Warren," droned the lieutenant on the desk. "The inspector and Captain Marsh are both here. I'll speak to them."

Warren rang off. He ran to the Seventh Avenue subway and wedged himself into the down town express. At Fourteenth Street he emerged, hailed another cab, and went on toward the rendezvous.

He dropped out of the second cab a short block from the place Benny Smart had named, and dodged into an alley after the cab was out of sight, saw to it that his pistol was ready, cursed his supreme folly in ever letting it out of his possession, felt his way swiftly along the dimly lighted corridor between two buildings with that weapon ready in his hand, and then came to the obscure and almost indiscernible stairway, up two flights of which Benny Smart had said he "held out."

Warren made the ascent without incident, rapped the agreed signal, and with his pistol clutched in his overcoat pocket, slipped into the room through the cautiously opened door the moment Benny's wizened hatchet face peered through the crack.

"In here," said Benny, leading the way.

Warren followed into a tidy little sitting room and sat down. Poverty had laid its mark on the threadbare furniture and furnishings, yet the eternal feminine revealed itself in pathetic little touches, such as a cluster of overly bright artificial roses, a neat old-fashioned rag carpet rug whose faded hues told of many washings, clean, cheap white side curtains at the windows, where the crafty old cab driver had already drawn down the green shades.

"You're some swifty," said Benny. "I jest got here meself. I shot acrost town, grabbed a Ninth Avenoo L, and then a benzine buggy to git here ahead of youse.

Say, that was a star pinch youse made to-night. Velvet Mary! Ha! Ha!"

"Can that laugh!" Warren's frown was forbidding. "What's the straight on this silk-hat toff—didn't you say his name was Gregory? And how's he going after that jane's ice? And what's her name?"

"Gregory's clubbin' the heads off'n some funny-water bottles to keep her at the club, while Nitrate Ned, the old peter-man and a couple of gat-men crumble her berg box. She's froze fast to two hundred grand of 'em. Her name's Winthrop. I'll show youse where she lives." [1]

Ha! Ha! Benny vindicated his surname by picking up a telephone directory and pointing out the name of the fashionable West End Avenue apartment house. Warren knew that he spoke the truth, for he had just come from the same place with Audrey and Edithe before leaving their cab to chat with Patrolman Sanders a block away from the club's entrance.

"When is this job coming off?" demanded Roger Warren.

"They oughta be on the job right now," said Benny, with childlike candor. "But I heard Nitrate Ned tell Gregory it would prob'ly be a tough box. You got plenty time. Nail 'em. You're a smart cop fer youse nailed Velvet Mary to-night, didn't youse? The slickest, smoothest worker—soft as silk, smoother'n silk! Ha! Ha!"

There was a stir at the door and a woman looked in. She was frowning. Warren caught a glimpse of her face reflected in the cracked pier mirror on the opposite

[1] The *argot* of the underworld, in simpler English, would read, "Gregory's buying champagne to keep her at the club, while Nitrate Ned, the old safe-blower, and two guards with revolvers, rob her safe. She owns two hundred thousand dollars, *et cetera, et cetera.*"

wall from where he stood. He dissimulated his newest surprise. His face gave no hint that the face he had seen was that of the real Velvet Mary.

He half understood the crafty little chap now, for since Mary was living decent, it suited Ha! Ha! Benny Smart, for some reason that lay hidden in the folds of his cracked brain, to assume that Audrey Murdock was the same girl!

There was mystery in that, too. Nevertheless, since it was now covered, but not entirely hidden, Roger Warren concluded that the balance of this tip might be one hundred per cent straight.

After all, the detective reasoned, his task was to find out what connection, if any, Harry Gregory had with this "job" at Mrs. Winthrop's apartment; to trace, if he could, the connection between Nitrate Ned and the two guardian ruffians with that sinuous, plausible, pliable scoundrel whom Audrey Murdock both detested and dreaded.

If he could do that he could serve the police department and also aid the girl whose life he had already saved this awful night.

This decision steadied him. His thoughts anchored to it gratefully.

"How will I connect Gregory with this job?" he shrewdly queried. "He's the real fall-guy, ain't he? This silk-hat toff is the one you want sloughed, ain't he? And you want the reward from the insurance company for the blow-back of the ice?[1] All right, Benny. You'll be well taken care of. But first show me how I'm going to land this Gregory when he's over at the club, and got a bomb-proof alibi by being with this jane whose box Nitrate Ned is to crumble.

"A cinch," hissed the ex-cab driver. "Foist youse

[1] Recovery and return of stolen jewels.

grab Ned 'nd the two gatmen. But watch your step. Dese two boids ain't no wooden soldiers wit' toy guns. When you've done that, Gregory's lawyer bails 'em, see?"

"No, Benny, I don't see."

"The fall-money is up. It's always up. Ned the Nitrate, he don't swaller no castile soap, even for Gregory. Youse kin grab Gregory at the lawyer's office when the lawyer shows up to spring Nitrate from the pogie, after youse pinch the three of 'em. Ned'll never squawk—not unless he knows Gregory's dropped him t'rough a trapdoor. Then mebbe he'll whisper something. Nitrate's too old to do many more bits. He's done three long stretches now. Dis job means life if Nitrate's nailed again, fer bein' a habitchal crim'nal. But get him. Eider way, youse can't lose. If he ain't sprung, he'll squawk. If he is sprung, nail Gregory at the lawyer's, for he's gotta be hanging around to get the jane's ice."

"O. K., Benny. You're fixed for life if I nail Gregory. Tell me, why do you want *him* sloughed? You could cut in on the reward without that, couldn't you, if I only got Ned and the other two birds that's with him?"

He shot the two queries as he rose.

"I'll tell youse, after I see him sloughed. I'll tell youse so much dat your head'll explode. Get him. You're a good cop. I dassent pop outa yere until youse do get him, since I lammed outa dat gold-lined joint uptown, where you seen me workin' as a hat-checker. I tole youse before, didn't I, dat dis Gregory's next to de king-bee of a swell mob—Mike the Maggot 'nd a dozen of the Old Mill gang—but youse can't get dis king-bee 'till youse slough Gregory. Don't worry. I'll be right yere. I dassent go out. Dey'd morgue me if I did. Dey don't know I'm here, fer dis ain't my reg'lar hangout. I'm only here wit' an old friend."

"Wait! Wait! How do I know this isn't another of

your frame-ups to get me, Benny? You grabbed my gun from my coat pocket in the check room at the club. You slid out of there with it in your hand, came down the side hall and around the corner. You hid behind that red curtain. You were going to shoot Velvet Mary. Why?"

Warren's hand shot out. He grasped the other man by the collar. Benny neither shrieked his semimaniacal "Ha! Ha!" nor did he squirm. His wizened face took on the same expression that Satchel Gusset's had worn when death set its seal upon it.

"Youse ain't so smart a bull as I t'ought youse was," sneered Benny Smart. "You was in Murdock's house the other night. So was me half-brudder, Satchel Gusset. Youse t'ought youse gunned him off. Youse didn't. If youse had I'da gunned *youse* off with' yer own gat from behind dat red curtain.

"Now, do youse believe me? I was goin' to give Velvet Mary de blazin' rod,[1] sure! Youse was too quick fer me wit' dat collar youse made of her. Her dad, Murdock —he's de king-bee of all dis yere mob I'm tellin' youse about. Gregory is only pins 'nd pants buttons alongside a payin' teller's desk in a bank, when matched wit' Murdock. Are youse goin' to stand here all night?"

Roger Warren decided to "dig where he stood." This tip was straight, and the artful schemer was no less astonishingly sincere.

He believed half Benny's story, the half about Gregory. The half about Murdock he believed to be born of the same delusions which had led the cab driver to call Audrey Murdock "Velvet Mary." He hurried away, pointing again for the subway, catching a local train and changing for an uptown express at Fourteenth Street, which would

[1] Meaning a pistol shot from a weapon with a rather long barrel.

take him to Seventy-Second Street and close to Edithe Winthrop's apartment house far sooner than by taxi.

He knew the house, the apartment's location, he had been seen there with Mrs. Winthrop, he was still in formal evening dress, even to a cane. His entrance was casual and with a certain easy assurance. He nodded pleasantly to the same elevator operator who had taken him up to Mrs. Winthrop's apartment earlier in the evening and with whom he had descended in her company.

When the elevator came to a stop at the third floor Warren walked quickly down to the hall door. He knew he would find it open, for no thief, with a lookout and an armed guard, ever locks a door behind him since he may need to use any handy exit if attacked and seconds count heavily for liberty as well as for life and death in such cases.

The door was open. Roger Warren leaped within with drawn gun. In two bounds he was along the parallel inner hall and at the open door of Mrs. Winthrop's boudoir.

The safe door was open. A man with his back toward Warren was half stooping and reaching within it. Benny Smart's tip was 100 per cent straight so far.

"Put up your hands, Nitrate!" called Warren. He glanced to right and left of the other man. No one else was visible. He stepped sidewise with the firm wall at his back and as the man at the safe door complied with the command, the lights went out.

Warren fired point-blank at the man by the safe. Three flashes and echoing reverberations answered him. He was the converging point of the three within the room. Their bullets hissed and whined over his head for he had crouched and fired twice again—with right arm extended at full length above his head and wrist bent at right angle.

They also fired again, at his flashing weapon—and missed.

The man who had entered behind him did not miss. The black-jack he wielded came down with vicious force slantwise on Roger's head. He was dazed but dodged the second murderous descent and grasped the wrist that held the weapon, firing again, not at the man he held but at another figure silhouetted against the window opening on the fire escape.

The snarling thug he held jerked back unwittingly, helping Warren to regain his feet. He was a brawny sort but the detective bent his captive's thumb sharply and forced him to grovel down, aiding the fall by a smart rap on the fellow's head with the butt of his gun. The second thug within the room, leaping to get past the two struggling in the hall, collided with Warren.

Outside the call of police whistles, reverberating nightstocks and clatter of running feet on pavement, signified that help was on the way. The lights in the hall were out. The buzzing near-by signified the elevator was without an attendant and Warren's fast-working mind, despite his first blow, told him that it was the operator of the elevator who had stolen up behind him in the dark and dealt him the blow from behind.

He thrust, fought, struck out blindly but valiantly at the two who were twisted and interlocked with him. The elevator operator beneath had grabbed the other bandit's legs in his stunned desperation. Warren wrenched himself free and struck at the second man, but the man on the floor, releasing his hold left the detective with this other antagonist, wrestling, writhing, reeling, and spiralling down the hallway—while the released elevator attendant arose, now as murderously intent on finishing the detective before help could come as if he were one of the other three who had been in the boudoir when Roger

entered it. His itching fingers reached the sleuth's throat. Roger held his breath and fought, breaking the clasp.

Ensued a short, sharp wordless scuffle, with three pairs of muffled feet paddling on the rug in the hall, then Warren's body was lifted upward and backward, his feet gripped nothing, he was flying headlong and backward down a marble staircase, whose abrupt and graceful curve to the floor below had never been designed to either impede or cushion a falling person.

He struck. The stone bludgeoned his head. Sea and sound, motion and light, swirled in his brain. The roar of breakers, the crash of planets filled his ears, and blinded his eye.

The three desperadoes in Mrs. Winthrop's apartment scattered. They were the professional criminals and Nitrate Ned went down the fire escape like an aged but still nimble simian.

The elevator man and the other gat-man in the hall both went down the front way. The elevator operator's fright was well dissembled, since it was partly genuine. He descended in his machine.

"Third floor!" he gasped to the arriving officers.

He shot them up with scant ceremony and thus the thug who had run down the front stairs regained the door and a semblance of freedom. It was only a semblance. A half block away he encountered Captain Raynor, in command of the West Sixty-Eighth Street police station, who was an acting inspector temporarily and making a round of posts covered by men of that precinct.

Captain Raynor saw the police officers running to the apartment house where Mrs. Winthrop lived and he next saw this fugitive dash out of the entrance and run directly toward him, as he was in plain clothes. He commanded him to halt. The fugitive replied with a shot.

It missed. The one Captain Raynor fired in return found its mark. The fugitive dropped, kicked, and the toll of vultures of the night was less by one.

Some tenant had called the station house and reserves were thrown around the entire block, gradually closing in, while active search of the house followed. Before this had been completed, Nitrate Ned had descended a short flight of the fire escape, firing his last shot with deadly effect at a uniformed officer who had entered the court. This officer went down and the gun of the thug followed him.

Nitrate hopped inside the window on the second floor and his hand released the jewel case, empty of its contents, and also the thin surgical rubber caps with which he had protected the ends of his fingers. The window was dropped and a patent sash-lock snapped into place. Three minutes later, a respectable doddering old man in pajamas, peering from the front door of this self-same second-floor apartment, in a quavering voice besought the officers "frisking" the hall to search his apartment.

"I saw a miscreant firing from the fire escape just outside my bed-room window," he piped. Toothless gums peered from a mouth distorted with fear and his palsied hands quivered with dread, as he mumbled: "What in the world are we coming to?"

Nitrate's false teeth were in a glass of water, he was old enough to have played opposite Ada Rehan, and his novitiate in crime matched her professional debut on the stage.

Two police officers, one in uniform and one a detective from the West Sixty-Eighth street station house, hurried in and ran to the rear of the suite of rooms. They snapped back the patent sash, one crouching low. The room was in total darkness.

A crouching figure on the fire escape rose with an ex-

pectant grunt then drew back in alarm and fired, point blank. His shot struck the man in uniform and the echo of the detective's weapon sealed this marauder's doom apparently.

He swerved, fell headlong the two stories and crashed on the court below near the stricken officer, his body alighting on the empty jewel case as motionless as that receptacle. The detective's shot had ripped its way straight through the vulture's heart.

His doom had already been sealed when Harry Gregory, at Murdock's suggestion, saw to it that Nitrate Ned had a sash-lock of that style installed on his windows. The confederate was also told to come down that way and wait to get into the same window provided he could not get out in front.

Dead men tell no tales, in fiction or in actual police business. This naïve idea, while disposing of the second minor vulture, also reacted enormously as a "bomb-proof alibi" for Nitrate Ned. He was a valuable man for James Murdock, and proportionate means for safeguarding Nitrate were thus invoked.

The false clew of the empty jewel case in the courtyard, together with the rubber finger tips and the badly wounded and unconscious patrolman, coupled with the dead thug who had fallen after being shot through the heart—plus, also, an open basement door which led through a maze of garbage cans and coal bins to an unlocked rear entrance —all these factors seemed to point to the escape of the third man.

James Murdock, now sailing softly on moonlit waters toward mighty Manhattan, had overlooked no detail that could have been foreseen. The false clew was pursued. A confederate, smoking in a window of a house across the street, glibly told of seeing a man emerge and run down this side street toward Tenth Avenue.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE GUILT OF INNOCENCE

REPORT of this "blow-off" from police headquarters when broadcasted by police telegraph to all stations, halted a brief preliminary query which Inspector Montrose was making of the supposed "Velvet Mary" at the East Sixty-Seventh Street station house, almost in a direct line across the city.

Acting upon Roger Warren's instructions, Audrey Murdock had been finally taken into the inspector's office, and as he was in conference with Captain Marsh at the same time about the "fade-out" James Murdock had effected in the Capitol city from Detectives Dean and Daniels of that detail, their conference was suspended by this prisoner's arrival, although she had been seated in the squad room for some time prior to being taken where they were.

Pending Warren's return, Inspector Montrose asked a few questions.

"What is your name?" he asked the girl, after summoning the matron.

"Audrey Murdock," said she.

The two officers exchanged glances. This coincidence seemed particularly and peculiarly astonishing, since they had been debating the wisdom of arresting a young lady by that name in case her father's whereabouts were not speedily traced.

The reason for this intention was that Audrey's fingerprints were on the same weapon that her father had unquestionably used to shoot Gusset; this circumstance, to-

gether with the really trivial—but seemingly important—one of her having disobeyed Warren's instructions in going upstairs and descending again before the arrival of either of these same two ranking officers at the house the night of her party, lent color and form to the suspicion that her visit might have been made to her father to carry down the gun he had used from the library.

The suspicion was further fortified by the fact that Warren had found her with her father when he returned to the library from below; that painstaking young officer had noted this fact on his report, with all other details, quite circumstantially.

Another factor which strongly inclined suspicion against Audrey was the statement of the real "Velvet Mary" Mallory to Inspector Montrose about the peculiar behavior of Audrey when replacing the pistol in her father's desk. So far as any information Inspector Montrose had gathered, Audrey might only then have removed the pistol with the attached silencer from Murdock's house and hidden it in the drawer when she thought she was alone.

"That wasn't the name you were arrested under, was it?" asked the inspector.

Audrey shook her head. She was beyond speech. Her white, wan face gave Montrose and Marsh misgivings; but with each of them, no less than with the arresting officer, it was a case of "the department first."

Audrey's dinner gown, donned for the delectation of her betrothed, and her extreme youth, guileless manner, and timidity under their wordless stare also created the impression that she was shamming.

"Who arrested you?" asked Montrose.

Her white lips could hardly pronounce the name: "Roger Warren."

"What charge?" he again asked.

"Murder!" Her whisper was low.

Montrose and Marsh exchanged significant glances. The inspector's grin was savage. It terrified the girl afresh. Roger Warren's face had also taken on that fierce look. But Montrose was only whispering to Captain Marsh: "He's a real cop. He didn't fall for this jane. I knew she did for him, and I was afraid he'd go overboard for her. He didn't. He beat us to the wallop and he grabbed her first!"

"He sure did," said Marsh. "Well, until he comes, let's see if we can find out anything more. She's Warren's prisoner, of course, and he's on special detail from the commissioner, himself. But he'll be glad to match evidence with you, I guess."

"The murder was in your precinct," said Inspector Montrose more loudly, "and I'm in command of this entire inspection district, and also responsible to the commissioner. I don't think there will be any question of whose prisoner she is, especially when the commissioner knows I was working to arrest Murdock, and Warren had no inkling of it. He must not have, either, until the commissioner himself permits him to know it."

"Right. I'll remember that little fact," said Marsh.

"How often do you use the alias 'Velvet Mary?'" asked the inspector.

"What do you mean?"

He looked at her, amazed. An old-timer should know better than to pretend such infantile ignorance.

"Have you ever been arrested before?"

She shook her head.

"Isn't your name—the alias, I mean, of Velvet Mary—and the rest of your record down town?"

"I don't know. I—I—"

Montrose snorted. He reached into the desk at which he sat and drew out the pistol he had taken from Mur-

dock's desk when the latter was at his country home and planning his trip to Washington.

"You've seen this before, haven't you?" he asked, insinuatingly.

"Oh, yes."

"You've handled it?"

"Only once."

"On that occasion did you whisper to it and smile at it?"

She blushed. Coupled with her blush was the hesitation of diffidence; and with the hesitation, growing terror at the grim, remorseless face of the man whose eyes bored her through—the same remorseless eyes that her lover captor had bent on her when swinging aloft the little statue he had hurled through the door and when he had ordered her taken forth in the dreadful grip of Patrolman Sanders, calling her by a name she had never heard before.

"Answer me!" said Inspector Montrose. His incisive tone was held to a normal pitch for he had five daughters of his own, and was also thinking how unutterably sad it would be if one of them should ever come to such a desperate pass as this shrinking girl.

She nodded her head slowly.

Montrose stared. He had expected a denial. She must be shamming.

"So you handled and talked to it, eh?"

She managed another nod.

"What did you say to it, and why?"

How he knew was beyond Audrey, although the question itself was much more comprehensible than anything else that had happened.

But to reply to the question was tantamount to breaking the faith she had plighted with a man who had proved

himself this dreadful night foresworn to his vow at the sacred altar of their common love. She could not do that, come what might.

Her temporary reprieve came when a lieutenant rapped on the door.

"Deputy Commissioner Roxey, sir, on the telephone. He wants to talk to you, sir, regarding a shooting and robbery in the twenty-eighth precinct. One of the bandits escaped with—"

The closed door hid the rest from Audrey's benumbed brain. Captain Marsh had followed the other officer from the room. The matron alone remained. Five minutes afterward came an order: "Take her down to the Tombs, and if Warren comes in, tell him she's my prisoner, now," said Montrose.

CHAPTER XXIX

IN THE CRYPT OF THE CARNAL

ALTHOUGH blinded and dazed by the shock of her arrest, although tossed into a caldron of doubt and dread by the questions Inspector Montrose had asked, Audrey Murdock's thoughts emerged into a confusion slightly less hopeless during her solitary journey to the Tombs. When she stepped out of the police vehicle in which she had made the journey, even this forbidding abode was softened by the radiance of a young moon. It touched the rock-girt courtyard, the turreted towers, and even the close-barred windows with such a sympathetic ray that it cast a merciful calm over her distraught nerves.

Hence she went within the prison's portals with a sub-

missiveness chiefly reflected from her new born calm. Her quiet demeanor was a misrepresentation of her identity and character. She seemed more the callous old-offender, whose conscience and emotions matched in hardness the concrete and stone and steel around her.

The matron on duty who took her in charge, noting her evening gown, gazed at her with the same air that she would have shown any other nymph from the night-life of New York. She knew only that another woman prisoner had arrived. She did not know that Audrey's inappropriate attire was due to her swift rescue from the murderous purpose of Ha! Ha! Benny Smart.

Audrey herself was dimly conscious of a short wait, of eyes that peered out at her before the matron's arrival from faces of men who wore caps and some sort of uniform that had bright buttons. She heard voices, but words were not then distinguishable.

She saw a paper signed and given to the officer who had brought her from the police station up town. The man who gave this paper also wrote something in a book. The officer said "Good night" to the prison official and left.

She was then taken by the matron behind a series of bars and grates covered by an enormous steel netting so fine a needle could not have been passed through it. She only knew that she had been moved from one space to another.

Then she was taken into a small room and the matron searched her. This woman's exploratory fingers were deft and skillful, but her touch seemed indelicate for one of Audrey's own sex. She showed the prisoner scant courtesy. She made her partly disrobe and even take down her hair.

The seams of her skirts and other garments were scanned; her mouth opened as if she had been a horse

for sale and a silver-plated instrument pressed around her gums and under her tongue, seeking tiny packages of narcotics wrapped in waterproof containers.

The matron seemed disappointed and studied the buttons on Audrey's evening gown with a microscopic scrutiny, as if dubious lest they would unscrew and reveal tiny cavities in which drugs might be concealed. The toes of her slippers were next probed.

This ordeal over and her clothing again in order, the matron beckoned to her prisoner and the two stepped into a dimly lighted corridor. Her guardian pressed a button, a door clanged behind them and the lock rasped into place.

Another matron appeared. Audrey, at a gesture, followed the second woman to the iron staircase.

"Murderer's Row," sententiously said the woman who had first taken her in charge.

"Then she'll have to go in wid Cincinnati Mag," said the second matron. "They've stuffed a lotta parlor broads and street-walking hop-heads into the rest of them empty cells."

Audrey followed the second matron up the staircase. A scent never distilled from attar of roses filled her nostrils. Prison disinfectants are not brewed from flowers. Formaldehyde or carbolic acid, plus exhalations from many bodies in a small place, defy an architect's genius for ventilation, especially at night.

Her heart almost stopped as she paused behind her escort at a barred door beyond which was the woman whose cubicle she was to share.

"Mag" was obese, gross, with a face so wrinkled when shorn of its usual veneer of paint and powder that she seemed one of the witches sprung from some medieval era. Her mordant eyes pierced the space between her pillow and the open door with the resentment of a crouching lynx.

"Who's the fresh fish?" demanded Cincinnati Mag.

"Velvet Mary," said the matron curtly. "Mind your manners, Maggie, or you'll be hearin' from th' warden. In wid yez!" she exclaimed to the shrinking prisoner.

Audrey Murdock had no choice. She summoned all her waning strength and walked within. The barred door clanged. A torrent of blasphemy and obscenity came from the next cell. Audrey shuddered and sat down on the edge of the other woman's bed as if she could never rise to her feet again, trying to shut out the sound by clasping her hands over her ears.

"I'll wring your neck if you don't can that chatter!" vowed the irate matron to the offender.

"Wring your grandmother!" snarled the woman addressed. "If you unlock the door to this cell, I'll bang yer brains inta an omelet and make that squab you jest bring in eat 'em."

Within the cell Audrey was not received with any excess of kindness. "Get off'n my feet, you blankety-blank-blank-blank doll!" bellowed Cincinnati Mag. "Where the hell's yer manners?"

Audrey rose, murmuring an apology.

"If you walk on my face when you climb up to bed, I'll dig a few trenches in that pussy-willow mush of yourn," growled the unpropitiated other woman. "So, that's yer monicker, eh—Velvet Mary! Well, you sure got a plush-lined nerve to squat on me and then try to pull a line of flossy prattle. Where d'ye think you are—in Peacock Alley?"

The pride that triumphs over torture kept Audrey silent. Cincinnati Mag drew from somewhere a cigarette and lighted it with none of the endowment of softer graces of Audrey's girl friends who also occasionally smoked, leering through her puffs at the graceful but drooping figure of her cell-mate.

A Jezebel of many cherished episodes was Cincinnati Mag. Much wine had bloated her until she was flabby and misshapen. The simple, seductive curves of her figure that had once lured her boon companions of the male sex were not even suggested; her neck was scrawny as a vulture's and her countenance held a fixed sneer, half of envy and half of guile.

"Velvet Mary!" she repeated. "Well, kid, no need to stand there all night. You c'n unhook the top berth 'nd grab off a little beauty sleep. Who'd you morgue, and who's yer lawyer?"

"I don't understand you," said Audrey faintly. "How do I go to bed? I must lie down. I think I am going to faint."

"Save it—save it, kid, fer your trial jury. Say, them's good ankles. If the gag wasn't so old, you oughta git the judge to order a fence built round 'em when you take the witness stand, so's the jury wouldn't fall fer you. Did you kill your sweetheart?"

Audrey put her hand to her head. "No," said she, as if to herself in reply to a question she had never asked herself before, "it was the other way. He killed me!"

Cincinnati Mag chortled. Her puffy chest rose and fell.

"Great! Pull it that same way, kid, when you git on the stand and can't remember how you bumped him off. Git old men on yer jury 'nd you're as good as out. If it was me, I'd be out in a week! Take it fr'm me. If I hadn't bunked with a young bandy-legged bum of a bootlegger, I wouldn't be jammed up *a*-tall. But he had the velvet. The bills was as crisp 'nd green as you look!"

She reveled in the new prisoner's look of haunting despair.

Audrey was too nauseated to reply. From an adjoin-

ing cell came the same raucous voice which sent fresh shudder through Audrey's mind.

"Hey, Mag! Wot you got in wid you?"

"Harry Thaw in skoits!" shouted Audrey's cell-mate. "He's rehearsin' th' unwritten law."

A gust of fiendish glee swept the corridor at the coarse jest. The horrid cachinnation swelled, then died.

"But he looks just like the angel child!" continued Cincinnati Mag. "You'd never think, to lamp him, that we both got the same lease from our dear landlord on the same terms."

Horror succeeded horror. Audrey managed, although she never remembered how, to reach the upper bunk, where she huddled in abject misery. Ribald jests, the scum of sin's most awful queries and replies, allusions and aspersions, reverberated through the corridors, with now and then a moan of agony from some other girl, whose twisting nerves cried out for the narcotic drug of which she had been deprived.

CHAPTER XXX

"TIED TO A POST"

WHILE Audrey was thus locked up under a temporary commitment, Inspector Montrose and Captain Marsh went to the office of Deputy Commissioner Roxey in the detective bureau. They found there Acting Inspector Raynor of the fourth district, as well, and Commissioner Roxey and the three other officers immediately proceeded to match up the results of the Winthrop robbery, and also scan reports from

other precincts wherein vultures of the dark had been abroad.

"It's a tough night," began Roxey, his face stern. "Besides this apartment house job, Captain Raynor tells me a cab, speeding south near One Hundred and Twenty-Third Street, with some murderous dog inside, fired at two patrolmen standing on the corner there, evidently just for target practice. Both were seriously wounded, one of them may die. There's a pawnshop job down near Canal Street where thieves burrowed through the back wall and bored into an old wall safe with no electrical protection behind.

"Another bevy of bandits threw an ash can through a Fifth Avenue window and made a clean get-away with perhaps fifty thousand dollars' worth of rare furs. Over in Queensborough there are two cases of robbery on the street and a tenement fire, evidently started to distract police attention, while a subway station agent was robbed. Inspector Montrose, where is Roger Warren?"

"I have no idea, commissioner. He phoned that he'd be in to look after this Velvet Mary prisoner, and he said to book her for murder."

"Where did he get her?"

"Patrolman Sanders, whom I detailed for special observation duty near the Versailles Supper Club, says she was arrested there by him, on Warren's orders. By the way, Mr. Commissioner, I have here a list of the guests at the Audrey Murdock party the night Satchel Gusset was shot in Murdock's library.

"The name of Edithe Winthrop appears as one of the guests whose names were taken by Patrolman Sanders according to Warren's orders that night. It was this Winthrop woman's safe that was robbed over in Acting Inspector Raynor's district. I had Warren's prisoner sent to the Tombs. Warren sent her in as Velvet Mary,

and she gives her name as Audrey Murdock. Evidently there's some sort of a connection between the two incidents."

"Explain that, inspector."

"I reason this way, sir. The Winthrop woman was not at her apartment, I understand from the report on police telegraph, when this job was pulled. It is a reasonable inference that the thieves that robbed her knew she was to be out. Where the Winthrop woman went I have no idea, but perhaps this Velvet Mary girl may know.

"I want her for something else as well—something of which the commissioner of police and I alone know. I'm going to see him the first thing in the morning. Do you think it might be a good thing to question her?"

"I think it's an excellent idea, inspector, inasmuch as there is no trace of the Winthrop woman's jewels. The elevator operator at the house where the Winthrop robbery occurred told Captain Raynor that there were several men fighting on the third floor in the dark hall; that he heard a disturbance and went up to see what it was about and got a nasty clip on the head just before the police got there. Somebody dropped a blackjack. It may have been the chap that ran out of the door whom Captain Raynor shot a half block away."

"What started that fight?"

"The elevator operator says that a man in evening clothes, whom he had seen come down with the Winthrop woman and another girl, earlier in the evening, returned to the apartment and got off at the Winthrop woman's floor, and then he went downstairs again. Almost at once he heard shots and scuffling and went back upstairs. He tells a consistent story, Captain Raynor thinks."

Inspector Montrose's face lighted up.

"In evening clothes? Why, Sanders phoned to the

station house after this Velvet Mary was sent in by Warren, and said Warren was in 'soup-and-fish!' That's why Warren didn't come back to look after his prisoner. He beat me to it, because I was thinking of arresting this same Murdock girl—who Warren says is also Velvet Mary—for another reason. So Warren went after the Winthrop bandits, single-handed! It's just like him. Maybe he didn't have time to ask for help. But what became of him?"

"I don't know," said Captain Raynor, "but my best guess is that he kept on after the thief that made a get-away through the courtyard and basement, who carried the jewels after dropping the case in the court."

He described the killing of the second vulture from the rear apartment window of the old man who also called in the officers.

Montrose, Roxey, and Marsh nodded simultaneously. The enigma of Warren's disappearance from the scene was quite typical of him. He was not only an athlete with a constitution of steel, he also possessed besides the constitution the courage of reason and character, aside from the dogged courage of a mere animal.

"He'll get that bandit with the jewels, and he'll be back," said Raynor positively. "He always gets 'em. But there's nothing to hinder our getting something from this girl, meanwhile, as Commissioner Roxey has said. Evidently she's the nucleus of a bad gang."

Accordingly Audrey was ordered brought from the Tombs less than hour after she had entered it. Meanwhile Inspector Montrose also sent to the bureau of criminal identification for the old mugg and finger-prints of Velvet Mary Mallory, made before she had faded out temporarily from police surveillance. He wanted to compare them with the prisoner's finger-prints taken from the pistol in James Murdock's desk, as well as to be sure he

was right. The detective in night command of the bureau reported that Roger Warren had taken these records to the office of the commissioner of police, and they had not been returned.

Far out at sea James Murdock wakened and lighted a costly cigar. He had left Detectives Dean and Daniels "tied to a post," and his alibi, as usual, was simple and irrefutable. He had left his purse in the cab with important papers, if he was ever questioned, and had returned to get it, and thus missed the train. His smile was synchronous with the summons of the matron in the Tombs to his daughter to make ready for a journey. Audrey had only to step from the bunk to the cell door. She carried a pillow slip with her to cover her bare shoulders.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE DICE OF GOD

"THE dice of God," says Emerson, "are always loaded!" James Murdock had been engaged in "loading the dice" for a long time. The last actually known touch of his artistic wickedness had been the double lie he had told about the death of Satchel Gusset; first, in denying to Roger Warren that he had known the man; next in denying to Inspector Montrose that he could remember what Gusset had said to him, on entering the house, before attempting Murdock's life.

At first the unexpected call to Audrey and the iron-featured matron's glance gave the girl a feeling of falling an interminable distance. Yet she had already fallen so

incredibly far and with such stupefying suddenness that there was no depth not plumbed.

Yet innocence and beauty have always somehow held a secret fountain wherein strength is renewed and increased. Thus it was with Roger Warren's sweetheart as she followed the matron through the door of the cell and down the long corridor with its sickening smells.

"Am I going home?" she asked as she reached the foot of the stairs.

"No. You're goin' to police headquarters. They sent fer ye."

"Oh, I've been crying. I wonder if I might wash my face, first, and have a drink of water.

"We kape no powder-puffs or lip-sticks in this hotel. You'll lose yer complexion," replied the matron with heavy irony.

"I never use cosmetics," said Audrey, so ingenuously that her guardian stared. "But I don't like to go—to go even where I'm sent, with a dirty face."

The matron stared. Then it dawned on her that this girl was no Circe. She was really what she seemed now, and not what she had first seemed. The bond of their common sex lost its quirk of previous misunderstanding.

"Poor lass," said the matron, *sotto voce,* as she led the way to the room where soap and water and a clean towel were to be had. "For why are they sendin' for you?" she asked. "And at this airly hour?"

"I do not know. I wish I did know," said Audrey.

Her simplicity, her youth, her failure to resort to the cajoleries that mark the "female of the species" among the brood of vultures of the dark, bred an unwonted tenderness in the matron, old enough to be her prisoner's mother.

"Have ye iver been arresthed befure?" she asked, when Audrey had drunk the cup of water.

"Never."

"Thin—if I tell ye somethin', will ye remember it—but fergit who told ye?"

"Yes."

"Oi think yer goin' over fer the third degree. Don't conthradict thim. It's aisier to agree wid 'em. If they git too rough, deman a l'yer. But it's worth me job if they find out I told ye."

Audrey's eyes brightened. There was courage in them. "They shall not know. And thank you for your great kindness to me!"

Inspector Montrose was the father of five daughters. He had seen them born into the city where he toiled as a guardian of the civic welfare; he had watched the successive miracles of each child-mind unfolding, expanding, rising from unconscious and helpless infancy to young womanhood.

He was, therefore, a little prone to unduly or arbitarily extend the scope of police authority with a young woman, or to wantonly bully or harass her, as any other father in mighty Manhattan or throughout the entire broad land. There was no latent impulse in his make-up or unrestrained ferocity, seeking some frivolous excuse for its unbridled exercise. Years of police duty had not brutalized him.

Inspector Montrose knew a few things. More things were unknown to him. He had reasoned with great care; he had studied the problem of the murder of Satchel Gusset with more than ordinary diligence; not that he should have occasion to bring Audrey Murdock in her rôle of Velvet Mary before him and the three other officers who were to sit in and seek to sift the wheat of truth from the chaff of appearances, for Montrose had not considered Murdock's daughter as a possible factor

in her father's crime when he had first ascertained that four shots instead of three must have been fired.

He began merely with the facts at hand and he added fact after fact and checked up each conscientiously. He did not yet know that Mike the Maggot was merely a manager for the place whose title deed was recorded in the name of Michael LeMar; nor that James Murdock actually owned this building occupied by the Versailles Supper Club and reaped a rich harvest from Mike's operation of it. All of that and much else was not yet known to Montrose. But he did know that Murdock and not Warren had killed Gusset. Warren's third shot had missed Gusset. Gusset could not have shot again. Police Surgeon Dell had already established that fact by the nature of the two wounds, the second of which was the broken upper right arm of the dead man.

Had Murdock admitted the shooting the case against him could not have been sustained. He had concealed the fact, instead of admitting it. He had twice lied.

Right there lay Inspector Montrose's difficulty. He had all the links in his chain but the final one—a motive. Murdock's motive must be shown; or if it was shown that he had killed the man with this pistol with a silencer attached—and had concealed the fact—then the motive of murder would be assumed, although the circumstances were beyond proof. The burden of proof would then automatically pass from the police department to James Murdock to explain if he could and exonerate himself from the charge of murder by his explanation.

This was the reason why Montrose decided to summon Velvet Mary for examination; to get at this one salient and all-important fact if he could, as well as whatever other facts might be disclosed regarding the Winthrop robbery.

The dice of God had rolled thus, because they had been

loaded with deceit and lies by James Murdock, clever, adroit, master-mind crook.

Four men with faces like iron masks sat at the table. A stenographer was near at hand and a policewoman escorted Audrey Murdock into the room.

Her reveries during the waiting which a guilty woman would have found almost more intolerable than the expected ordeal had taken a most fantastic turn. Audrey had been wildly, gloriously in love. Bereft of that love, she felt a corresponding sense of the unreality of everything.

It was all too hideous to be true, she told herself. Such things simply could not be a part of human experience; especially when a girl was guiltless of anything—the mere idea of murder—much less its deed, either alone or as an accomplice.

She sat down and scanned the four men. Montrose she knew and one other of these men had been with him up town. The others she had never seen before.

Audrey did not quail. She was as serene as Joan d'Arc en route to the stake, as proud as Marie Antoinette in her tumbril jolting toward the scaffold where the guillotine awaited her aristocratic neck. Again the first lie her father had told reflected in the minds of Deputy Commissioner Roxey, Acting Inspector Raynor, Inspector Montrose, and Captain Marsh. Audrey's composure could not be that of an unsophisticated and innocent girl as her youth and manner proclaimed her.

They looked at each other. In the mind of each ran the same thought: Velvet Mary! Always a smooth worker, smoother than silk. Always disdainfully indifferent to a cop. An old-timer!

Inspector Montrose launched his first question.

"What is your true name?"

Mindful of the matron's warning and buoyed up by

the surety that this was all unreal, she replied indifferently:

"Whatever you wish to say it is."

The first impression was confirmed and strengthened. Old-timers are prone to agree quickly, lest proof of their clumsy falsehoods be adduced from police archives and their plight become so much worse.

"You said up town to-night that your name was Audrey Murdock."

"Yes."

"Was that true?"

"Yes."

"Then you don't deny that you're also Velvet Mary?"

"Why should I deny anything you say? You would not believe me if I did say I was not Velvet Mary."

"Well," said Montrose dryly, "I'm glad you are inclined to be candid. How long have you lived in the Fifth Avenue House where Satchel Gusset was killed?"

"You may put down whatever time suits you."

"Why do you say that?" He flushed. Sincere to a fault, Montrose could only conclude she wished to evade any answer that would implicate her accomplices. The other officers felt the same. They were in an unenviable situation. Repeated robberies and murders throughout the city, thefts of magnitude, colossal cleverness—all these seemed focussed in the latest depredations of vultures of the dark.

But Montrose, for all his feeling of irritation that this girl was pertly defying him, kept his head. This was serious police business. A murder had been committed. He must probe for the motive and find it if he could, for it seemed a chance that might not be his again.

"Because no matter what I might say, you would not believe it."

"You are mistaken," said he quietly. "I will believe the truth if you will speak it."

Audrey's smile was not for him nor any of the rest. It was the reflection of her momentary inward glow at thought of Warren. It faded, and a look of sadness took its place. This puzzled the four men. Montrose went on with another question and thereafter kept them flying at a lively rate.

"You call yourself Audrey Murdock, I believe. That is, you have for some years past."

"For some years past," she parroted. "Yes, I believe I have."

"And you call James Murdock your father?"

"Sometimes I call him 'daddy.' "

"You find it a convenient arrangement?" he retorted.

"I have never found it inconvenient."

"You remember the night Gusset was killed?"

"Very well."

"Where were you when the shot was fired which killed him?"

"With my guests on the floor below in the large parlor."

"Your guests were served with liquor?"

"Yes."

"Where did it come from?"

"My father's wine cellar."

"How long had your father had this liquor?"

"I do not know. Suppose you ask him?"

"I'll make a note of it," facetiously replied Montrose. "By the way, where is he?"

"I do not know."

"When did you last see him?"

"Night before last."

"Where?"

"At our country home."

"Was he there next morning?"

"No. He had gone away."

"Where?"

"I do not know."

"Did he say he was going and mention any place?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, why do you say you don't know?"

"Because I only knew he said he was going to Washington to meet Senator Sylvanus. His plans are always subject to change."

Montrose nodded. "No doubt," said he dryly, thinking of the trail lost by Dean and Daniels. "Have you heard from him since he went away?"

"No."

"The night Gusset was killed, did you see your father before Gusset entered the house and while you and your guests were at the party on the floor below?"

"I do not know when the man entered the house nor do I know his name."

"Well, did you see your father at any time after the party began?"

"Yes. I saw him some time before the shots upstairs threw all the guests and myself into a panic. He came out on the balcony that overlooked the room. I saw him, and ran up and tried to coax him to come down and take part in the frolic."

"Did he come?"

"No. He told me not to mind his old-fashioned ways. He said he had some business matters to go over in the library, and then he asked Mr. Gregory not to leave the house before he saw him."

"Was Gregory a guest at the party?"

"Yes."

"In costume?"

"Yes. He was attired as Lord Carnarvan, the explorer."

A clew at last! Not to the pistol, but to the young

man who had been arrested with Audrey, who was booked uptown as King Tut, and who had said he wanted to shoot Lord Carnarvan.

Montrose quickly brought Freddy Carrington's name, his connection with the party, Edithe Winthrop's presence, and her character as Aphrodite. Audrey said she had not seen Carrington since the night of the party, until she had been arrested.

There was a rap on the door. Deputy Commissioner Roxey was wanted on the telephone, and as he stepped into his superior's private office to take the message, Audrey sat during the pause that followed with a look of absolute unconcern.

Crushed, humiliated, driven to the verge of insanity by the behavior of the man who had vowed he loved her, Audrey had lost her high ideal. For the four police officers she cared as little as for so many marionettes, or for what they said or did.

Nor for Roger Warren. He had falsely pretended to return her high regard for him in kind, and had then hurled her among the vilest of the vile, paraded her for the profane gaze of a vulgar crowd on the street. She drew the coarse pillow slip from the Tombs prison a little closer.

CHAPTER XXXII

BACK TO REALITY

ROGER WARREN won his way back into the world of external things unaided. He was lying prone, and something dark and musty was close by as he recovered a completer control of his mind. He raised himself, bewildered at the darkness. He put out

his hand and touched the cold, clammy strands of a mop, leaped up, tottered, and seized on whatever was nearest for support. It was the brass edge of a porcelain lined sink.

He found a match and scratched it cautiously. The flame revealed the interior of a janitor's closet. The door was closed. He wondered how he came there, for he had no recollection. He put his hand to his throbbing head. The fingers came away sticky. His laceration of the scalp was still bleeding.

In a flash he picked up the thread of life where he had laid it down in the struggle with the thugs in the darkness. He turned the cold-water faucet and bathed his head. Then he looked at his watch.

He had been "out" for nearly an hour. He hastily dried his face and hands on his handkerchief, drank a few great gulps from the spigot, replaced his hat, and cautiously pulled back the spring lock on the door.

He stepped without and found himself at the rear of the hall. The marble steps above and the ugly curve half recalled a fall. It was no matter. He was bruised and sore, but the thing that mattered was his failure to arrest any of the bandits looting Edithe Winthrop's safe. He glanced at the numbers on the doors. All bore the usual legend with a 2 as the first figure.

He knew then that he was on the floor below where the robbery had happened, and he was about to start up the back stairs when he heard the voices of Harry Gregory and Edithe Winthrop from the floor below. He crept cautiously around the corner of the back stairway leading downward, and glancing along the rail toward the front of the house, he saw a door open silently and a pyjama-clad man wearing slippers and a lounging robe also appear.

This man was clearly outlined against the windows of the front of the hall. Details of his figure were indis-

tinct against the glare, but Warren knew that it was Nitrate Ned, or else his head was so badly hurt that his brain was playing tricks on him again.

He stood quietly out of view, listening. So did Nitrate Ned at the other end of the hall. Dim pennons of the coming dawn were stirring the sky outside, and the rays around Nitrate's slender, decrepit figure grew a little less obscure.

The conversation below was audible to both eavesdroppers above.

"Yes, officer," Harry Gregory was saying, "you said that before. I understand Captain Raynor gave orders to allow no one to come in. But why does he refuse to allow this lady to come into the place where she lives? Her apartment is on an upper floor. Perhaps Captain Raynor was speaking of strangers, not residents of the house."

"Whose zish Cap'n Rainbow, anyhow?" Mrs Winthrop's tones were charged with something else than mere rancor. "Thish my 'partment. You tell Cap'n Rainbow to run along and sthart a rain somewheresh else. I'm going to my roomsh. What elsh have I got roomsh for? Does Cap'n Rainbow pay my rent? I guessh not. C'm on, Harry!"

"Just a moment, Edithe! We must not disobey this officer until he can get permission for you to go in. He's only obeying orders. The police department sometimes has to give orders for police reasons."

"Indade and they do, sor!" said the patrolman guarding the entrance. "There's been a robbery. Cops shot up and two bandits killed!"

"Robbery?" Gregory's tone of surprise was admirably feigned.

"On the third floor, sor. Mrs. Winthrop's apartment. One of the men got away."

"Great Cæsar! Well, officer, this is Mrs. Edithe Winthrop. And I'm—here is my card. We're just getting back from supper. Will you be good enough to telephone the captain and ask him if Mrs. Winthrop can go into her rooms? Tell him that it will be—well, it will be embarrassing for her to have to go elsewhere. You understand?"

"Yis, sor. And thank you, sor." Warren could not see the bill Gregory tendered nor its receipt, but he knew one had been given and accepted. It was typical of Gregory.

Warren peered again at the end of the hall. Nitrate was just turning back into the front room of his own apartment. He closed the door without a sound. The hinges were well oiled and the dexterous fingers of the old-time safe robber released the spring lock in the knob with the same wary care that he would have manipulated the combination.

"On second thought, officer," said Gregory suavely, "perhaps it is just as well not to trouble Captain Raynor. But if you will escort this lady to her apartment—I'll be enormously obliged and later on so will she. I'll wait here."

"Youshm' frien', Harry. You're coming wiszh me, thash aw' ri'. We sh'ld worry about zish Cap'n Rainbow," protested the maudlin widow. "He ain't no better'n any ozsher cop, ish he? Little Audrey," she leered, "hash blowed away wish her fella. Why not me?"

"Mustn't speak ill of the police department, Edithe. They're uncommonly efficient!"

"Didn' they shay I'd been robbed?"

"Yes—that's just it. You have been robbed." He turned to the man in uniform. "What was taken, officer?"

"I dinno, sor. But they cracked a safe."

"You heard, Edithe? Your safe has been robbed. The police are after the criminals," said Gregory soothingly. "Now, be good, my dear girl. Be good and go with this officer to your apartment and then he can telephone to the station house to Captain Raynor, while your maid looks after you."

"If I'm your dear girl," she protested, "I ain't goin' to let polish rob me of you besides my jewelry, Harry. You're my dear fella ainsh youshʔ"

"I'll say I am," said Gregory, winking at the policeman. "I'll call you up later, Edithe. Must get home and get some sleep. You get some, too. Never mind about the robbery. The police will attend to that. Run along."

From his vantage Warren could hear it all. He wanted to see what Gregory would do next. With this in mind he tiptoed noiselessly down the back stairway, pausing at the curve between the second floor and the ground floor, which was also the first numerically. He flattened himself speedily in the marble-wainscotted angle. The skein of crime he was seeking to untangle certainly seemed about to lose one of its knots, for the rear door to Nitrate Ned's apartment overhead opened just as Gregory, strolling nonchalantly toward the rear of the hall, came abreast of Warren's hiding place on the landing above.

He watched Murdock's young partner light a cigarette. The reason for sending Mrs. Winthrop upstairs in the patrolman's custody was faintly appearing. Gregory—perhaps—intended to go up the back stairs, get the loot from the old cracksman, then dodge out again.

Warren wondered if Gregory could possibly pass him by unseen. He doubted it. Gregory, however hesitated —and whatever plan he had fell through. From the door came a stern voice:

"Hey who are you and what are you doing there?"

Another officer had popped up from below.

Warren had a sudden sense of frustration, of defeat on the verge of victory. He waited silently while Gregory glibly told of his arrival and of his waiting for the other officer's return from Mrs. Winthrop's apartment. The explanation sufficed. Presently the patrolman returned from the third floor in the elevator and Gregory bade both officers a courteous good night.

The door above had closed again and Warren stepped down into the hall on the ground floor. He flashed his shield to the sergeant, whose welcome chevrons showed he was in command of the men still in and around the apartment house.

Then Warren walked to the elevator man and gave him one long searching gaze. The fellow blanched. Warren jerked him from his car, borrowed handcuffs from the sergeant, who gave his name as Snyder, and directed that the chap be taken to the cellar.

"Put two men in the courtyard to watch the fire escape to the northerly second-floor apartment," he whispered. "Then come back with two men and meet me in the hall on the second floor."

It was quickly done. Warren posted one man in uniform at the back door of Nitrate's suite of rooms, came back to the other entrance, and pointed.

"Smash that door," said he, "and cover me when I go through. I'm going in."

They flung themselves at it. The door flew from its hinges. Warren leaped within, they followed. Nitrate Ned was now in bed, feigning sleep. He was handcuffed and taken out.

"Book that elevator man on a charge of assault with intent to kill," said Warren to Sergeant Snyder, "unlawful entry with intent to commit a felony and robbery. Book Nitrate for burglary in the first degree, robbery in

the first degree, and assault with a deadly weapon. Have them both in court at 9 o'clock without fail. I'll be there. Is Captain Raynor at the Sixty-Eighth Street house?"

"No, sir. He was summoned to headquarters by Deputy Commissioner Roxey after we got the other two birds." Sergeant Snyder related what had happened.

Warren stepped back into Nitrate Ned's apartment and gave it a thorough search. There was no sign of the missing jewelry. He was chagrined at this but not disheartened. Strange situations arise in police business and stranger expedients must be employed at times to recover stolen property. Warren noted every detail of the apartment with microscopic care. Then he telephoned to Commissioner Roxey. It was his call which caused the suspension of Audrey's examination and then it was resumed.

CHAPTER XXXIII

"VELVET MARY" SURPASSES HER RECORD

"DO you know a woman named Edithe Winthrop?" asked Inspector Montrose, when Deputy Commissioner Roxey had returned and whispered to him.

"Yes."

"She was one of your guests the night of the party?"

"Yes."

"You and she are quite close friends socially?"

"We visit each other's homes."

"When did she last visit you?"

"She came down to our country home day before yesterday."

"Who else was there?"

"My father, his partner, Mr. Gregory, Roger Warren, the detective."

"What was Warren doing there?"

"I would rather you asked my father."

Montrose started. This was a double entendre with a vengeance. Now that Warren had arrested this girl and charged her with murder, he wondered if Warren also had Murdock's arrest as a possible goal. It was very queer. In that case, he might also beat Montrose to the wallop again, and that was not in keeping with the inspector's plans at all.

"Why do you say that?" he demanded.

"Because of what my father said to me."

"What did he say to you about Warren, if you remember?"

"Father told me," said Audrey, her queenly scorn tinting the words, "that he had asked Mr. Warren to keep me safe while he went to Washington to see Senator Sylvanus."

Montrose suppressed his outward smile. "Well, Warren seems to have kept his word. You're safe," said he grimly.

"So it would seem, in one sense. In another, it would seem that I am very unsafe."

"You never did have much use for cops, did you?"

He was baiting her shrewdly, hoping to make her lose her temper. Her hauteur as she replied amazed him.

"Pardon me. I'm getting used to them quite rapidly."

Montrose winced. "Well, there's nothing like making new acquaintances, unless it is meeting old friends, is there?" he humorously returned. "I wonder if you could tell me why your father made that request of a policeman?"

"I cannot tell you what father said for I was not present when he made the request of Mr. Warren. But I

think I know what was in father's mind when he made it."

"Will you tell us that?"

"Yes. The night this man who crept into the house was killed by Mr. Warren, when I went to bed I could not sleep. Father saw my light when he went to retire and came to my room. He asked me if I was ill. I told him I was not, but was worried. I cannot remember our conversation except I did tell him I thought this man had come there to kill him and not merely to rob him."

If Velvet Mary, in the heyday of her former career had surprised police officers more than once, she nearly paralyzed Montrose then and there by this statement. His wildest wish and his shrewdest reasoning had never flown as far as such an admission disclosed.

"What did your father say to that?" he purred.

"I do not remember, except generally. He said that my idea was nonsense and that I was nervous. Oh, yes, he promised me a yachting trip as soon as he had got some business matters settled."

"What had this conversation to do with your father's request to Detective Warren?"

"I do not know that it had anything to do with it, for I did not hear what he said to Mr. Warren. But I surmise that father was anxious lest something should happen to me during his absence."

"Did he expect to be away long?" craftily queried Montrose.

"I think he said he expected to be home within two days."

"What reason did you have for thinking this man had entered the house to kill your father?" Montrose knew his clew was getting hotter. He could hardly credit this unexpected good fortune.

"I had no reason."

"Then what made you say it to him?" he flashed.

"A woman doesn't always reason. She has thoughts, feelings, apprehensions."

"Was there any other circumstance that contributed to this apprehension before you mentioned your fear to your father?" He was worming this way and that to learn about the pistol's presence.

"No circumstance. Just my feelings."

"You let your feelings run away with you at times?"

"Yes, I'm afraid I do. Many times." Her face lost its pride. She was thinking of Roger Warren's embrace and of his first kiss.

Montrose grinned. He was thinking of the time Warren had first arrested Velvet Mary. He had been a lieutenant then in that same precinct.

"You went upstairs, too, after the shots and in spite of the directions of Detective Warren that every one should remain below?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I wanted to be sure my father was safe."

"No other reason?"

"None."

"Warren found you there when he came up, didn't he?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"I was sitting on father's lap and crying on his shoulder."

"Crying?"

"For joy that he had not been killed and that Detective Warren had killed the man who otherwise would have killed him."

"Your father told you that?"

"Why, certainly. What else could he tell me? Didn't Detective Warren also admit it afterward in court? The newspapers said he did."

"The newspapers were right," said Montrose dryly. "What did you do next?"

"I went to thank Mr. Warren."

"Did you thank him?"

"I tried to. My heart was very full. When I went to shake his hand I found blood on it, and then learned that he was wounded. So I tried to thank him, in part, by bandaging his arm."

"Did you go to the medicine closet for a bandage?"

"No; I just seized the first thing I found handy. It happened to be a sample of silk on my father's library desk. He's in that business, you know."

"Yes, I know. But you went downstairs again before Captain Marsh and Surgeon Dell and I reached the house, didn't you?"

"I think I left the library just as you were coming up the front stairs."

"You went down by the back stairs?"

"No; by the corridor that leads from the upper hall to the balcony overlooking the parlor. The stairs go down into the parlor from there."

"Why did you leave just then?"

"I was sorry I had disobeyed the detective's orders. My father made an apology to him, and explained that I was his only child, a very thoughtless and willful girl at times."

"Did you take anything downstairs with you that you didn't take up?" demanded Montrose sharply.

Audrey paused.

"Were you ever pinched before?" asked Montrose, tossing an improvised herring across the trail quickly, lest she should scent his object.

She looked at him in bewilderment. There was no reply.

"Don't you remember the time," taunted Montrose,

"that Roger Warren first arrested you some years ago, when you knocked down another police officer and walked up the buttons of his blouse? And didn't you say to Warren, when he arrested you on that occasion, 'Hello, kid. Take me down to court. You're a good looking cop.' Didn't you say that?"

She could not credit her ears. Again the overwhelming sense of unreality. Could Roger Warren have told this man such a falsehood? Was the whole world a monstrous living lie?

"Don't you remember that?" repeated Montrose, following up his advantage as he sensed her faltering spirit.

"I have no such recollection."

"Well, that's a little better than denying that you were ever pinched, isn't it?"

"I don't know what you mean by 'pinched'?"

"Arrested."

"Thank you. You should compile a dictionary of police slang for use of your future woman prisoners and let them study it in advance. It might save time," said Audrey.

"You didn't answer a question that I asked you a few minutes ago," he resumed. "I asked you if you took anything downstairs with you when you left your father in the library after Gusset was killed that you hadn't taken upstairs with you."

Again Audrey hesitated, although she did not avoid the eyes of the four men, now bent in a searching gaze upon her, as if they would tear apart her soul for the truth. In spite of her awful experience following the arrest, her certainty—due to Montrose's taunting query about the former arrest—that Roger Warren was not the chivalrous young Galahad he had appeared, but a fiend in masquerade, in spite of this shock which had all but

dethroned her reason—Audrey hesitated and flushed vividly.

She was furiously outraged at the inspector's persistent efforts to profane her shattered but still sacred shrine. Audrey ignored the repeated question. She relaxed without remembering it, without troubling herself at its significance, without knowing that her blush, to the four spellbound police officers, became the semaphore of artful trickery to conceal a fact, the more especially since she had relapsed into a stoical silence.

"You do not deny that you did take something else downstairs with you that you did not take up, do you?" patiently queried the inspector a third time.

"No."

He was nearing his goal. Proof that the pistol was in Murdock's library when Gusset had entered it would give him the link of evidence that he needed. He lifted the pistol with the attached silencer.

"You have seen this before?"

"I do not know."

"I showed it to you up town when you were first arrested. Captain Marsh was with me. You then admitted handling it, whispering to it, laughing at it, did you not?"

"At that time," said Audrey, "I was nearly frantic with shock. I do not know if that is my father's pistol or even the one you showed me when I was almost incapable of knowing I was alive."

This was tantamount to a slur, if not an accusation that her questioner was trying to frame her. Her elusiveness was rare, but it was typical of the girl Montrose honestly believed to be a wanton.

"This is the pistol which your father had in his desk drawer, the one you handled; your finger prints are on it. The police department has an eyewitness to the fact that

you did handle it, whisper to it, laugh at it," he sternly replied. "And you're arrested for murder. You know that, do you not?"

"It was the most unexpected event in my life," said she.

"No doubt," said he dryly. "You'll have to excuse Detective Sergeant Warren for not advising you beforehand."

Audrey clenched her hands, half in anger, half in anguish. She was conscious of some menace, something that lurked behind the faces of the four men whose features were still like iron masks save when Montrose spoke.

"I want to be fair with you," said Inspector Montrose. "I only want you to be fair with me, for I've got to do one of two things. If I do one—and I will, if you'll let me—you'll be a witness for the State of New York. If you refuse, the charge of murder stands, you face indictment, trial, and possible conviction. That's the straight of this matter."

She was mute. Her heart, although buoyed by the consciousness of innocence, beat more faintly at his solemn manner and his more solemn words.

"Here's your chance to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," he went on. "You have to admit, if you do tell the truth, that you took something downstairs from the library the night when Gusset was shot that you didn't take up with you. Isn't that part of the truth?"

"Yes."

"Was it in plain view?"

"It was not."

"You've told the truth thus far. Patrolman Sanders said he saw you come back downstairs, and when I asked him he said there was nothing in your hands. I reasoned from this that you must have hidden it out of sight. You did, didn't you?"

In that instant her previous forebodings and haunting dreads fell away. Her high color, her clear, unwavering eyes, her proud look had in them some curious quality that swiftly dissolved their close-knit suspicions.

Her head came up haughtily.

"Yes!" said she.

Her monosyllable thrilled them unaccountably.

"What was it?" Montrose muttered, while steeling himself against the hypnosis in her tone. He was a police officer, pursuing his duty to the farthest limits of his authority.

"I will not say what it was I hid!" replied Audrey.

It was not a defiance of police authority. It was something too paradoxical for words, for the most damnable lies in the labyrinth of crime may sometimes breed the most noble self-sacrifice, and the soul serene may stand rooted amidst the vilest degradation.

"You hid it well?" pursued Montrose.

Audrey's smile was both sweet and cruel. She spoke as if her reply were intended for herself alone.

"Yes," said she softly, "I hid it so well that I think no police officer—even the one who arrested me to-night—will ever be able to find it again!"

Montrose was not nonplussed like the others. He had confirmed his statement to the commissioner of police that this girl had "gone overboard" for Roger Warren the night of "Satchel" Gusset's murder.

His desk phone rang, and word was whispered to him that Warren was waiting to see him. This added a new "kink" to the situation, and a most difficult one. For a moment or so Inspector Montrose was frankly puzzled. His clews were as delicate as the flame of a candle which he might be carrying through a large and otherwise unlighted house. The inspector was bound by his own private instructions from the commissioner of police as

rigidly as Roger Warren was bound by similar instructions from the same source to "follow his hunch" and develop evidence against Harry Gregory and his associates if he could find it.

Nowithstanding, Inspector Montrose decided to continue the examination of Velvet Mary. As he turned to question her again, he saw by her face that something would complicate the situation. She did not wait for another query, but, then and there, introduced a wholly new factor by taking the initiative and remarking:

"I demand a lawyer to protect my rights. I believe I have some rights!"

Montrose bowed ironically.

"Your request is perfectly proper. You have rights. So had Detective Sergeant Warren when he arrested you on a charge of murder—so did two other gallant officers over in Acting Inspector Raynor's district—this police officer on my right is he—who were both shot down after your arrest, while bandits were robbing your friend Edithe Winthrop. These two poor fellows had the right to arrest those bandits, to say nothing of their right to go home to their wives and families unharmed.

"I believe you said that Mrs. Winthrop was a friend of yours. Before you insist upon your own rights, would you not be willing to aid the police department of this city to protect the rights of others? Have you ever been in Mrs. Winthrop's apartment, for instance, and did you ever see the safe which was robbed?"

"The law," said Audrey, her eyes flashing, "will decide all those matters. It will first decide if I am Velvet Mary!"

"You didn't deny that you were when Roger Warren ordered your arrest, did you?" he thundered.

"It is not necessary for me to deny what I am not. Nor had I any opportunity to do so, if it was necessary

I was dragged out of the foyer of the Versailles Supper Club without being allowed a word. I was humiliatingly exposed before a large crowd, then taken into your room for questioning; next hurried down town into another prison—the Tombs! Then I was brought here."

"You did not deny your identity before these other officers, either." Montrose felt this was merely a cheap, theatrical pose, yet the prisoner was well within her rights in demanding counsel.

"You asserted it," she retorted. "I had no control over you."

Inspector Montrose felt, just here, that what he had hoped might be another flickering gleam from his little candle to reveal a badly needed clue was developing into a situation where the candle might go out—for lack of tallow. But he could rely on Roger Warren. The commissioner of police relied on him. Since Warren had returned to headquarters and was now waiting a conference upstairs, Montrose closed his own inquiry then and there.

"Take this prisoner downstairs," said he curtly. "Get her a good breakfast from a restaurant. I'll see her later, and then she can send for any lawyer in the city who will come to her on her request."

CHAPTER XXXIV

"NOTHING IS TOO WONDERFUL TO BE TRUE"

WARREN, meanwhile, hurried to the identification bureau to get the old mug and finger-prints of the real Velvet Mary to show to Inspector Montrose. As already explained, that department could only say that Warren himself had taken them

out and they had not since been returned. He was on his way back to meet Deputy Commissioner Roxey, Montrose, Raynor, and Marsh, when he discerned Audrey being taken to the cell. He followed at a discreet distance down to the lower floor.

The matron had not yet locked in her charge when Warren came up to speak to her. At sight of the young detective Murdock's daughter whirled like a young lioness at bay!

She wrenched herself from the matron's grasp and confronted her former lover, her eyes blazing, her tense face deadly white with unutterable loathing.

Warren's romance had already been riven apart by circumstances over which he had no control. The corridor and the open cell door was now a theater. It staged a tragedy, and the matron was its sole auditor.

"What does this mean?" demanded Audrey.

Warren caught his breath.

"You are Inspector Montrose's prisoner—not mine," he replied.

Her scorn could not increase. Her words came bubbling like lava.

"You arrested me! Why?"

"I cannot tell you—yet."

"You unutterable beast! You coward! You charged me with murder! Of whom? When? Where?"

"Here, here!" interposed the matron. "None of yer high jinks, now!"

"Mind your own affairs," said Audrey vehemently. "I'm glad you're here, though. I want a witness to what I say to this—this fiend. I wouldn't notice him if you were not here. Woman," she went on wildly, "never, never believe a man. They are all alike. Traitors! Cowards! Unspeakably vile! And this"—she pointed at Warren, whose countenance was like chalk—"is lower,

oh, far lower, than Judas Iscariot! Even Judas did not betray a woman." She clenched her hands. "And now he says that I am another policeman's prisoner—not his!"

"Be calm!" implored Warren. "I'm going to see—"

"Calm!" She laughed hysterically. "Do you know where I've been? Buried alive in the Tombs! And then racked by the third degree—by your orders!"

"No," said he doggedly, "not by me. There's been a mistake—"

"You are right!" flashed Audrey. "But I made it when I believed in you. I trusted you. I didn't comprehend how base you could be How could I guess that you, seeking cheap notoriety, would lie, would throw me into a den of vipers like yourself, only bigger and more hideously cruel! No, not that! I'm wrong. *You* were the slimy serpent that started it all, not they. You lied! You called me by a name I never heard before. You know you lied! How dare you stand there and see me put again behind these bars!"

"Trust me!" he implored.

"Never again! I did trust you. That's why I'm here. What a blind little fool I was to believe you. Do you think you can ever undo or atone for the evil your useless lie has brought? To *me?* What did I ever do to you or to any one to merit such wretched treatment, such terror, such hideous surroundings?"

"Git into that cell!" snarled the matron.

"Never!" defied the girl.

She tossed the policewoman back against the corridor wall.

"Never!" she reiterated, "until this thing in the semblance of a man answers my questions! What have I done? Whom did I murder? When? Where? Ah! You cannot answer! You monster!"

The astonished matron made another dive in the girl's direction.

"Wait!" said Warren.

The matron paused.

"I cannot answer you—now," said Warren. He felt himself choke and he could speak only with great difficulty. "But, later—"

"Truth knows no time," interrupted Audrey. "It takes time to think out a new lie to explain the first one, I suppose," she sneered. "But, believe me, my father trusted you as well as I. And when he returns—"

She stopped. Her gust of anger dwindled and died. There was something in his brooding eyes that was more eloquent than denials, more convincing than words, although the eyes were set in a mask of iron such as Montrose and the others had also worn.

He stepped nearer. The matron stood is if riveted to the floor. Audrey recoiled. His eyes held the same yearning that he had shown when they had plighted their troth in her father's home.

"Ah!" thought the girl. "How poisonous is love. I thought I drank from a crystal chalice."

It was most strange. She heard again the far off, flutelike, alluring notes of Pan, the rippling of limpid, laughing water as it sprayed against stones or eddied around them.

"Remember this," said Roger Warren in a low, vibrant tone that died to a hushed whisper as he continued, "'nothing is too wonderful to be true,' Audrey. Just try and remember for a little while. I cannot explain. Not now."

He caught his breath as sharply as if he had been stabbed. There was an agony of entreaty in his last, haunting look at her.

It seemed a prayer unspoken, a petition unique and

solitary. Yet it was not altogether humble since it was surcharged with the same ancient impulse that moves the earth, the sun, the stars. It brought to his words a new cadence no less than the emphasis of his brisk step as he whirled and left, walking back along the corridor. They fairly sang themselves into her brain.

"Nothing is too wonderful to be true!"

Audrey moved toward the cell door like a somnambulist. The divine reminder Roger Warren had spoken made the horrid night appear a myth.

There was no past. There was no prison. There was only her immortal dream—the dream she had deemed forever lost, now returning. She sat down inside the cell. Her crescendo of reawakening joy brought the added balm of sleep.

CHAPTER XXXV

A FREE HAND FOR WARREN

IT is doubtful if four men of similar position and responsibilities ever jointly awaited the arrival of a detective of the sergeant's grade with more lively anticipation than Second Deputy Commissioner Roxey, Inspector Montrose, Acting Inspector Raynor and Captain Marsh awaited Roger Warren. Pitted all night against an entire criminal band whose elusive and facile brain-engine was unsuspected and unidentified was the brain of this one intrepid chap, whose imagination had flung a tape measure of conjecture around Murdock's business partner, Harry Gregory. Each of the four men had a different reason for desiring to hear what he would say, although some of the reasons were overlapping.

Commissioner Roxey was, quite naturally, anxious to know if Warren's phone message that he had arrested two other men in the Winthrop jewel robbery would "hook up" with the astonishingly audacious North River silk robbery of four nights before, and if the huge booty in jewels had been recovered. Inspector Montrose wanted to know what Warren had on Velvet Mary that had led him to send her to his district headquarters on a charge of murder; for he had naturally assumed this charge arose from the killing of Satchel Gusset; and this young detective's quest was—as he assumed—a coincident one to the task Montrose had assigned himself—to arrest and convict the girl's father.

Captain Marsh, while not "in the know" regarding Murdock's almost proven capital crime, was very keen to learn how this supposed old timer, Audrey Murdock, or Velvet Mary, had been spotted and nailed by Warren in the Versailles Supper Club, which both he and Montrose knew was conducted by Mike the Maggot under his French alias. Captain Marsh also foresaw interesting possibilities regarding Gregory and Mrs. Edithe Winthrop being developed from the prisoner who had called himself "King Tut," since the girl they all four supposed was Velvet Mary had identified this society sap as Freddy Carrington.

Acting Inspector Raynor was equally merged in wonder as to how Warren had managed to snare two more prisoners in the apartment house wherein the robbed Mrs. Winthrop lived, while his own men from the West Sixty-Eighth Street police station were still swarming in and around it—without Raynor's own men being able to identify the bandit-desperadoes and make the same arrests.

After giving Audrey Murdock the first word of comfort which he had been able to offer her as a reassurance for all that had happened, Warren went directly into

conference with the four other officials. Notwithstanding the bludgeoning which his emotions had received and the intervening period of semiconsciousness, Warren came in as briskly as if nothing of this sort had happened at all.

His eyes were as steel gray as those of Inspector Montrose when the latter had been in search of truth from Warren's sweetheart prisoner. Moreover, his bearing was that of one who has no time to waste on trivialities. He saluted, and as Deputy Commissioner Roxey gestured toward the fifth chair, he sat down.

"I've got to talk fast, and we've got to move fast," said he—"that is, provided you all agree with me. I've got Nitrate Ned and another bandit locked up at the West Sixty-Eighth Street house, in Acting Inspector Raynor's district. I haven't got the jewels. Sergeant Snyder told me what Inspector Raynor thought—that another bandit got away through the courtyard, the areaway and the cellar with Mrs. Winthrop's diamonds, after dropping the case in which she kept them. I'm not going to contradict that idea; but, assuming Inspector Raynor is entirely correct, I think he'll agree with me that we've got to get them, and make that recovery as quickly as we can."

Raynor nodded, and so did Roxey.

"If the jewels are gone or if they are in the house," went on Warren, the words flowing with swift precision, "it is going to be very difficult to recover them by ordinary pursuit or by ordinary search. Too slow."

"Right! How?" said Roxey and Raynor in unison And Raynor added: "Wasn't there another man on this job?"

"There was," said Warren unhesitatingly.

"Where was he?"

"Outside the house either on the street or in the courtyard. He was the lookout."

"Then they tossed the stuff to him, case and all, from

the fire escape; he dropped the case and made his getaway through the cellar?" queried Raynor.

"I'm not sure. Anyway, it makes little difference. We're going to get that bird, Inspector Raynor. We're going to get him with the goods—that is, if you men share my viewpoint. I hope it strikes you all the same way that it strikes me.

"You asked me 'How?' This way: First, call off Sergeant Snyder and all the other men. I'm going back up town. The lookout wasn't caught nor shot. That proves he got away. If he has the jewels, he isn't coming back to get them. So guarding the house is futile. If he hasn't the jewels, and is coming back to get them—you can bet my life against the fate that overtook Bernard Gusset when he went into James Murdock's house to kill Murdock, that this lookout *isn't coming back to get them while any cops are around that house!* Hence, we're wasting time, watching the house in that event."

The fox that had planned this crime was not yet in the trap Warren had set, but as surely as Warren was a detective, so surely was the second trap already set in that splendid young officer's imagination.

"Listen!" said he. "Inspector Raynor, I was in that house when your men came in." He swiftly described his struggle with the thugs, his self-immurement in the janitor's little closet, and what had followed on his emergence when Gregory and Mrs. Winthrop had arrived at the house.

"The luck broke good and bad for me," said he. "I nailed Nitrate Ned and the elevator operator, but I didn't nail Harry Gregory, because Sergeant Snyder was a wee bit too much on the job."

They grinned at his rueful countenance as he detailed that disappointing incident.

"The only reason I got in and caught them at work,"

went on Warren, "was because I was in evening clothes, and the lookout on the street thought I was a guest at the house, and so did that elevator operator, having seen me with Mrs. Winthrop herself before. Otherwise, the lookout on the street would have sent a warning signal, and so would the elevator operator, who was very much on the job in this affair. Here's his trademark."

He swept off his hat and disclosed his head with the surgeon's plaster. "This is a bad night for the big mob," grinned Warren. "Inspector Raynor, bring that bird down town for the morning line-up to-morrow—not to-day—for he's the same bird that Deputy Commissioner Roxey and Deputy Commissioner Harlan had in the line-up the morning after that North River silk robbery. He's Leonard Grove, the gentle fisherman, who was innocently on his way to sea. Don't you remember?

"We thought Harold Yates was the bird who blackjacked the captain of the tug in that river holdup. It was the other way around. Yates was the bird with the fast motor boat who took Grove off. Grove was the bird who wielded the blackjack. Take his fingerprints off the jack he hit me with last night—compare the prints on that jack with the prints of the elevator operator; then compare 'em with the prints of Grove you took the morning after that robbery, and you'll see we've got one grand little hook-up.

"And, Inspector Montrose, I've got some more stuff for you on that Gusset affair. Can't go into it now. Not just what you might think it is, but I'll explain everything before the Commissioner of Police to-day at, say, ten-thirty o'clock this morning. Can you meet me in his office then?"

"Yes," said Montrose. "I suppose you have got the goods on this Velvet Mary?"

"Sorry to postpone explanations, Inspector," said War-

ren, "but I've got to beat it, in a minute or two, and get those Winthrop diamonds."

"Why not bring Grove down town this morning?" asked Inspector Raynor.

"Because, Inspector, I don't want the rest of the uncaught birds in this silk job to know I'm hot after them. Commissioner Roxey understands, I'm sure. Besides, if we do bring them down town this morning, I can't get those Winthrop sparklers. I'd like Inspector Raynor to detail four detectives to watch a certain lawyer's office and his residence. I don't know what lawyer it will be, but we'll be over that hill when court opens at nine o'clock. Whatever lawyer appears for him—that's the chap's place to watch. It's a double cinch!"

"How?" demanded Roxey eagerly.

"This way, Mr. Commissioner: The lookout didn't know I was a cop when I went in; neither did the elevator operator, as I've explained. The lookout didn't dare go in after Inspector Raynor's men went in, unless he was already in the court and got away through the cellar. The elevator operator didn't dare try to leave, although he didn't know what had become of me—for to try to leave was tantamount to courting a summary arrest on suspicion by Sergeant Snyder or any of the other officers. So both the lookout and Grove had to make forced moves, because of the quickness of the uniformed men in that precinct. Inspector Raynor's speedy men also probably saved my life, for it kept the thugs from finishing me on the stairs."

"Absolutely bomb-proof analysis," agreed Deputy Commissioner Roxey. "Go on, Warren."

"The 'fall money' for Nitrate Ned is up. The lawyer to defend him if he's grabbed is notified by now. Don't you see? The lookout that got away will notify the lawyer that Sergeant Snyder got Nitrate Ned. The law-

yer will show up to bail Nitrate, he may try to bail Grove, too. But you boys can put the magistrate wise about Grove's recent arrest, without letting the lawyer know what's coming off for Grove and thus keep the fact a secret from the rest of the big mob.

"The minute that Inspector Raynor calls off his men, that minute the lookout is going into that house, after those jewels—if the jewels are there; for if they're still there, he's watching that house right now."

"But he'll know you this time. How are you going to get over that hill?" asked Raynor.

"I'm not going to try to get over it until just before I go to court," said Warren. "Then I'm going to walk into Nitrate Ned's room. Just one squint around. Then I'll beat it for the West Fifty-Fourth Street court. Inspector Raynor, your own men will then nail that lookout, at the office or the house of the lawyer who will then be appearing for Nitrate Ned and Grove in the Fifty-Fourth Street court. The lookout will be at one of those two places.

"Whether he goes back to the house or whether he doesn't, he'll be there with those Winthrop jewels to give to Harry Gregory, the lad who planned the North River silk hold-up and the same lad who planned this Winthrop robbery—and Gregory will be there, you can be very sure, to get the diamonds from the lookout.

"You see, Gregory wanted to go up those backstairs, but Sergeant Snyder scared him off when Nitrate Ned opened his back door. And Gregory, since he could trust Grove in the North River job, had no hesitancy in planting him in this apartment house to help in the Winthrop robbery. Things equal to the same thing are equal to each other. We've got Grove. We'll get them both.

"Gregory's alibi, now, is that he was at the Versailles Supper Club with Mrs. Winthrop. He'll have to have

another alibi when we grab him with the lookout, while this unknown lawyer is talking his head off at Fifty-Fourth Street court. I'll be in court, too. But until I'm needed on the stand, I'll keep out of sight. To make the game strong and fool this big and brainy mob, Inspector Raynor, suppose you file the usual short affidavit against Nitrate Ned and the elevator operator, without disclosing that the latter is George Grove?"

Inspector Raynor leaped to his feet.

"By gad, Warren," said he, "you've got it covered. I'll do anything you say!"

"That's unanimous," said Roxey, after a minute of silence.

"I'll say it is," said Inspector Montrose.

"Me too," said Captain Marsh.

CHAPTER XXXVI

"SOAPY SOL" AND HIS CLIENTS

ROGER WARREN hurried away to have his head examined and bandaged by a police surgeon and to get some badly needed treatment to sustain his efforts for the busy morning. At 8:45 o'clock he walked again into Nitrate Ned's apartment and scanned the room. There was just one alteration in its interior. There had formerly been a blue cake of soap on the wash stand. Now there was a white cake there. No maid had yet appeared. He phoned this fact to Inspector Raynor at the Fifty-Fourth Street court and Nitrate Ned was led in almost at once, from the "bull pen," while Warren hurried to court and waited in the warrant clerk's office, to be called as a witness. Inspector Raynor personally

appeared and filed the usual short affidavit, charging Nitrate Ned with the offenses for which he had been booked.

The magistrate looked at the prisoner. He reached for the penal law and read two sections required when a prisoner is arraigned for a felony.

"Do you wish an attorney before you plead?" asked the magistrate.

"Yes," said the prisoner.

"Have you a lawyer?"

"I have a friend who is a lawyer. I'd like to send for him."

"Who is he?"

"Counsellor Solomon Chatterton," said Nitrate, as if he did not know that "Soapy Sol" was already in the room. Mr. Chatterton was just then engaged in a whispered conversation, with another ostensible client, a woman, who was in the rear.

The court crier called his name. Soapy Sol advanced to the rail and looked at the magistrate and then at the prisoner. His face registered surprise.

Then he advanced and shook the prisoner by the hand. The magistrate frowned. Mr. Chatterton was glad he frowned. Informed of the charge against Nitrate, he asked for opportunity to confer with the prisoner. They went back into the cage and the next case was called.

Presently, Mr. Chatterton appeared and asked to see the "information" on which the warrant was issued. It was handed him. He scanned it with care. He was a good lawyer—sometimes too good, since his wily defenses for accused felons were highly technical. A deputy assistant district attorney was with Inspector Raynor.

"I'm ready, now, Your Honor," said Mr. Chatterton, after a prolonged scrutiny of Raynor's affidavit. His client was brought out of the cage. Two capable detec-

tives were already outside speeding for the Attorney Chatterton's down town office. Two more were speeding for his house up town. Both were in automobiles.

"Is there any other sworn information than this?" began the artful attorney. "If so, I should like to see it."

"That is all,' said the magistrate.

"Then before my client enters a plea, I request permission to interrogate the affiant, Raynor under oath. This affidavit of his is made entirely upon information and belief. It does not state the grounds of his belief that my client is guilty of a felony and as Your Honor is aware, the Court of Appeals has repeatedly held that this is necessary."

Raynor was sworn. He admitted making the affidavit.

"On what information?" asked the attorney, "since you were not present, my client says, when he was arrested."

"On information supplied by Detective Sergeant Warren of police headquarters."

"That's all," snapped Chatterton. "Now, Your Honor, I move the dismissal of the prisoner from custody on the ground that his arrest is illegal. The original affidavit should have been made by Warren or he should have filed an affidavit supplementing that of Raynor. Because John Doe swears Richard Doe told him that somebody else is guilty of a felony is no reason why that somebody should be arrested. It is one of the reasons why he should not be arrested and that is the law."

It was the law. The police knew the law. But it was necessary that Counsellor Chatterton should be entertained and diverted for a few minutes, while the police trap already baited at his office and at his house

should be given time to be sprung if anyone entered these two places.

In the rear of the courtroom stood a fairly tall well-dressed, shifty-eyed man. He had waited to see that Nitrate Ned was really arraigned. He had waited outside the apartment house when the police were withdrawn after Raynor's order was given which was some time after the same man had telephoned to the attorney at his home the news that Nitrate Ned was in the toils.

On hearing Counsellor Chatterton's remarks this first man quietly left the court room and pointed up town to the attorney's house. So, also, did Harry Gregory but he came by cab and from an up town residence. The man who had left the court room had also been in the apartment occupied by Nitrate Ned. He had a key and although the broken front door was still open he did not use it. He went in the rear door further down the hall, entered the bathroom, picked up a piece of blue soap, dropped it in his pocket, replaced it with a white one, walked out and went back to his own basement apartment, opposite the Sixty-Eighth Street police station, all more than two hours before court had opened when Nitrate was the first prisoner brought to the bar.

He took precautions to see that he was not followed when he went up town. They were needless. No one was in sight when he plunged into the subway kiosk and reconnoitered the street for a possible "shadow." He was the last person on the up town subway train.

He entered the apartment on Riverside Drive and went directly into the suite occupied by the lawyer, also using a duplicate key. Gregory was admitted five minutes later when he rang. The two conferred. Then the detectives came in from a rear door and arrested them both.

The man with the blue soap in his pocket submitted

meekly to being handcuffed. So did Gregory. Both were too surprised to resist. They were taken down town. Each refused to talk. Gregory was put in a cell adjoining that of the elevator operator who had been arrested for blackjacking Warren. This was also a police ruse, but the prisoner did not know Gregory. The master-mind of James Murdock had seen to that. So the two did not converse.

Meanwhile, Roger Warren took the stand in the Fifty-Fourth Street court. He identified Nitrate Ned from his back. He told of telling him to put up his hands and of what followed, until he was knocked out.

Attorney Chatterton rigorously cross-examined the witness, eliciting the fact that Warren had more than one hour afterward come back and arrested Nirate.

"You say he opened the rear door of his apartment, as well as the front one. Wasn't that and this prisoner's listening a perfectly natural act, after all that had previously happened, both within his apartment and outside of it?"

"I think you are quite correct, counsellor," sarcastically replied Warren.

CHAPTER XXXVII

"SOAPY SOL" SPREADS "THE LATHER"

"ISN'T it a fact that this same man you afterward arrested invited the police officers into his apartment?" stormed Chatterton, "told them that he had seen a miscreant outside, firing at another police officer from the fire-escape; and didn't the police come into his

apartment and kill one of the real robbers from his bedroom's rear window?"

"I cannot say as to that," said Roger Warren. "I was unconscious at the time."

"Then you cannot deny it, either?"

"No, sir. I cannot."

"Did you find any of the stolen jewels in this man's apartment?"

"No, sir."

"So," triumphantly sneered the attorney, "your whole proof against this decrepit old man is that you *think* his back was toward you, just before the light went out —is that it?"

"I saw him very distinctly."

"We will waive further examination," said Chatterton, "and ask your honor to fix bail. Before your honor sets this amount, I want to say this: I know this prisoner. It is true that he has been three times formerly convicted for major felonies. But he has paid for them. He paid in full during the long weary years he served in State's prison, years fixed and meted out to him by judges of our higher courts.

"He has been a free man for nearly five years. He has been living an honest life. I am an officer of this court and of the Supreme Court of this State. I will make oath to all of this if your honor wishes, for I defended this man and advised him to plead guilty on the occasion of his final offense. I told him then that when he came out I would aid him.

"I told him after he was released that I would get him a job where, as a chemist, he could earn an honest living and go straight. He knew that if he was ever convicted again of a felony it meant life imprisonment. He is not guilty of this present charge of felony. He is working and earning a good salary. He works every

day. I got him a position in New Jersey and he is there employed. I told his prospective employers he was an ex-convict, and they, nevertheless, hired him on my plea. I gave them an official transcript from court records of this poor old man's previous convictions and sentences. So far as I am aware, that record is in their safe right now.

"Under these circumstances my former client—and my present one—for I am still his friend and will stand by him—went to work for them. He has held that position continuously for nearly five years. His first salary was only two hundred dollars a month. He is such an expert chemist that this has been voluntarily increased from time to time until for the past three years he has received one thousand dollars a month. This shows he had no motive in abandoning a life of rectitude and engaging in a crime which could result only in another term in prison.

"I recite these facts because these police officers have made a mistake—a natural error, it may be, because they may not know of this prisoner's reformation. Hence their error is an honest one, since they would certainly know of his former record."

Chatterton paused for breath and then voyaged onward in a fresh sea of mellifluous words.

"I think the mistake an honest one. I am perfectly willing for my client to go to trial again, and, despite his record, on the fact. I do not impugn the testimony of Detective Roger Warren. He appears to be an efficient, truthful young police officer. He is also an intrepid man, for the newspapers have teemed with the account of his preventing a wealthy Fifth Avenue resident from being shot to death in his own home within the present week.

"Nevertheless, Detective Warren admits, unhesita-

tingly, that he had just one slight glimpse of this prisoner's back, as some other marauder stood in front of that safe which was robbed—then the lights went out. He also admits that he was struck down by some one with a blackjack afterward. He became unconscious, and was in that condition for some time. We have his own testimony for that.

"He may have been mentally confused by that foul blow, hence honestly mistaken in this identification. And, as against this honest belief that his identification is nevertheless an accurate one and a true one, your honor cannot ignore the fact that this same detective does not deny that .this prisoner at the bar afterward aided other police officers—very materially aided them, in fact—in trying to effect an arrest of the real miscreants.

"Now, I do not think I am asking anything unreasonable in requesting your honor to take all of these admitted facts into consideration and admit this prisoner to a nominal bail. He has atoned for his former crimes. To try to compel him to atone again is not justice. It is a most flagrant injustice."

Attorney Chatterton was in magnificent voice, and his own fervid and semilacrymose emotions worked up into a fine, frothy quaver in the timbre of his tones. He pulled up short, just here, and waited.

He did not know Grove, alias Johnstone. Nor did Chatterton know that Grove was already finger-printed as a suspect, following the North River silk robbery. But Murdock knew it, and so did Gregory. Both knew that when Grove's finger-prints were compared with the former ones—if he fell—that Grove was "against the guns." Grove did not know Nitrate save as a lodger. Nitrate had gone up the fire escape to the Winthrop apartment. So Grove was already elected for a trip up

the river, the same as Satchel Bernard Gusset had taken, twelve long years before.

James Murdock's superlative cleverness in alibi making was astonishingly fertile. When he needed an exceptionally accurate and bomb-proof alibi for any handy man for whom he had future need, Murdock arranged matters—as in this instance—to allow the police department to furnish it!

As the magistrate looked down at the prisoner and his attorney, another man left the court room. He was a rather small, wizen-faced, and quite old, although a well-garbed, unassuming sort of chap, and seemed merely a spectator, like other morbid regulars who find in criminal court rooms the kick that they cannot afford to buy at theaters whose specialty is high-class melodrama.

"Oh, I do not in the least doubt your statement, Mr. Chatterton," blandly replied the magistrate. "By the way: there is another prisoner also arrested by Inspector Raynor's men—a man named Johnstone, the elevator operator in the same apartment house where this robbery occurred. Do you also appear for him at this hearing?"

"No, your honor. I have never even heard of the man. He has never been a client of mine that I know of. At least under that name."

This was quite true. James Murdock was far too crafty to put all his eggs in one basket, even when the handle of the basket must be temporarily entrusted to an equally crafty lawyer. Chatterton did not even know Murdock. Murdock found lawyers—and cops—sometimes very useful for his ends. Nitrate Ned Marks was always useful to Murdock, and Murdock intended to use him in a new and very extraordinary way. That was the reason this attorney had been retained, the fall

money for bail supplied, and other details arranged, all prior to undertaking the robbery of Edithe Winthrop's apartment.

"I think, Counsellor," continued the magistrate after a moment or two more of reflection, "that while you have been most solicitous in your efforts to aid this formerly notorious criminal to reform, that perhaps the object of your well-meant and unselfish consideration may have again strayed from the straight and narrow path without your knowledge."

"I am not in accord with your honor, quite naturally," said the attorney.

The magistrate raised his palm.

"I had not quite finished, Counsellor, what I was about to say."

"Oh, I crave your honor's pardon!"

"I was about to add that perhaps your client had found a fresh and irresistible temptation in the jewels of this Winthrop woman, who, it seems, lives in the same apartment house where he lodges. The value of the stolen jewels, Inspector Raynor has said in his short affidavit, is in excess of two hundred thousand dollars, according to the insurance policy. This, as you may see, Counsellor, is practically the equivalent of your protegè's salary for nearly twenty years. His previous life long record in similar robberies must be considered, and it weighs heavily against him.

"It is true that the jewels stolen were not found in your client's apartment; but I must also take judicial cognizance of the identification of the prisoner by Roger Warren. It was this identification and not the record that led him to come back and arrest the prisoner. So far as I know, also, the police have no trace of the stolen jewels. Ordinarily I should feel impelled to hold the prisoner without bail. Under the circumstances,

however, which you have pointed out, of his admitted aid to the police officers searching for the other robbers, which raises a strong presumption of his innocence, I will admit him to bail in the sum of fifty thousand dollars."

It was splendid advertising for Chatterton. Nitrate Ned was remanded for a few moments. Chatterton was too clever to have the surety company bond given immediately. Roger Warren then started down town for his appointment with Inspector Montrose and the Commissioner of police.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE MANIAC, HIS VICTIM AND OTHER MEN

NITRATE NED and his confederate en route to oblivion—as it was soon proved—left the Fifty-Fourth Street court room.

"I've got to go up town to my house," said Chatterton. "Walk over to Ninth Avenue with me and then I'll walk up to the Sixty-Sixth Street station. How did you come to fall, Ned?"

"That plainclothes cop busted in on me, past the lookout and everybody else, in evening clothes. How he knew I was there I don't know. There must have been a leak somewhere. He's a smart cop, too. I was down the fire escape and in my room before the harness bulls come upstairs. I had to move fast. I planted the sparklers. I guess the lookout will meet you at your house. But there's a screw loose somewhere. Maybe I'd better lam out of here."

"Oh, no! Not with that fifty grand up for bail, Ned. Stand pat. I'll beat the case. No need to lam. Then they'd nail you and—"

In the middle of his lawyer's sentence Destiny nailed Nitrate Ned Marks, without further ado and with one of Ned's pet chemicals, nitrogen, the active principle of all gun fire. From out of nowhere came a bullet. It struck Nitrate Ned Marks "amidships," so to speak, and he went down with a streak of fire through his abdomen. He writhed at the feet of Soapy Sol Chatterton, whose astonished horror was heightened by the fact that he had heard no sound.

The assassin who shot from the convenient alley shoved the heavy pistol with a silencer attached into a more convenient pocket, walked out of the alley's other end, hopped into a waiting cab, sat down, and was hurried to the Ninth Avenue elevated at its Fifty-Ninth Street station.

"Velvet Mary!" he chuckled. "Ha! Ha! Well, I missed her but I crossed that boob cop, Warren. I won't miss anybody else. Ha! Ha!"

Benny Smart paid the cabby, mounted the L-steps and went to an up town station where he took another cab to the Versailles Supper Club. Once there, he had a long talk with Mike the Maggot.

"Despise not the day of small things" is a trite proverb and a true one. Benny Smart had gone from his friends' hangout armed again with a pistol and silencer which the real Velvet Mary Mallory had taken from Harry Gregory's desk, in search of Warren's prisoner, Audrey Murdock, at the court room at East Fifty-Seventh street, where he had expected the prisoner to be arraigned.

The rest has been told. Benny Smart did not intend to allow himself to be dissuaded—or hampered—by any

mere cop from the uncompleted scheme of vengeance for which his half-brother Gusset had died.

Mania takes many forms. Homicidal mania renders its victims both cunning and reckless. Gusset had been reckless. His half-brother was not and Mike the Maggot found what Benny Smart had to say of the most intense interest, during the identical time that Roger Warren was closeted at police headquarters with the Commissioner of Police, before the news of Nitrate's murder became known.

Soapy Sol Chatterton had touched off another murder fuse in Benny Smart's brain. His oleaginous alibi for Nitrate Ned had sealed Nitrate's fate. Looking vainly for Audrey Murdock in the wild hope that she might be at the West Fifty-Second Street court, because of the Winthrop robbery, Benny heard how Nitrate had crossed a pal on the Winthrop job, when the soapy attorney made his statement in court. That is an offense always meriting death in the code of honor of vultures of the dark, whether they are greater or lesser birds of prey.

Benny Smart still had the gun and silencer belonging to Gregory. He was still looking for Audrey Murdock. He was also determined to kill Warren on sight, as well, lest Warren arrest him for his attempt to assassinate Audrey from behind the scarlet curtain at the Versailles Supper Club.

Thus Inspector Montrose had saved Audrey's life again, after Warren had first saved it, by ordering her to the Tombs and afterward to a cell at police headquarters, pending threshing out her case with the detective who had arrested her and charged her with murder.

Inspector Montrose telephoned to the Commissioner of Police for his own appointment at ten o'clock and

the commissioner's private secretary saw to it that he had the time reserved for him and also located the missing fingerprints and "mug" of the real Velvet Mary.

"Hell's bells!" mused Inspector Montrose. "Where am I at, anyway? This isn't the Velvet Mary I had in custody last night, at all. It's another girl? I wonder what ails Warren? Is he bugs? He didn't act bugs when he came back to headquarters and planted Gregory and Grove. They're both downstairs and the insurance company's representative and Mrs. Winthrop are on their way here to identify the sparks Nitrate Ned stuck into that neat little box inside the cake of blue soap. He had them on him when he was nailed.

"We've got Brownie Joe Goodman at last with the goods, as well. Roxey has the sparks. But, Mr. Commissioner, I'm lame on this girl. She's the slickest, smoothest and cleverest girl I ever tried to talk to, besides. If she isn't the real Velvet Mary, then she's smoother than that silky old-timer ever dreamed of being. How are we going to figure this out?"

He detailed the story and while waiting for Warren to arrive, the Commissioner of Police also scanned the police stenographer's transcript of the two examinations the night before when Audrey Murdock was in police custody. When this was completed, the head of the department looked across his desk at Inspector Montrose.

"There are two angles to this Murdock murder case, as I see it," he said. "One of them is this: You and I are fairly well acquainted with New York City. If anyone asked us, we would unhesitatingly say: 'Yes, I know the Borough of Manhattan very well.' That's true, isn't it?"

"Very true, sir."

"And yet, Inspector, there are a great number of square feet on Manhattan Island that neither of us has

ever inspected—despite all these years of active police business.

"It is much the same in this Murdock murder case, Inspector. Just as there are great gaps in our conscious minds regarding certain areas of Manhattan Island, because neither of us could have ever known every square foot of it, inside and out, at any one time—so there are certain gaps in your consciousness and my own for that matter, right now, regarding Audrey Murdock and her connection, if any, with this pistol with which we two men alone know Satchel Gusset was killed by her father."

"I've got to admit that," said Montrose unhesitatingly.

"So have I. I admitted it when I stated the facts. Now, Warren is a cracking good police officer or I wouldn't have him working on my confidential special details. What do you say if we leave it to him to supply that gap, whatever is lacking?"

"He doesn't dream I'm after Murdock, does he?"

"Certainly not. And we won't tell him you are. But he's a lightning fast thinker. He's absolutely honest. He's devoted to duty. He arrested this girl. You told me she went overboard for him, didn't you?"

Montrose grinned. "I was dead right. She admitted it to me without knowing it last night." He related the circumstances of the end of Audrey's examination.

"Well, I've got to hand it to Warren," went on Montrose, "for I was afraid he'd fall for her. He didn't. He arrested her—or else he arrested her after he did fall for her. This is a mighty hard case and a mighty queer one, Mr. Commissioner. I need that one more link of proof."

"Right. We'll get the proof. I'll make Warren get it without knowing he's after it. Now, he arrested her.

He's got to make good on that charge of murder. That isn't your job, just yet."

"She's his prisoner," said Montrose, with another dry smile.

"Until both her father and she, if she's guilty as well as he, are both your prisoners," smiled back the Commissioner of Police. "Well, he's almost due. I'll see him alone and get to the bottom of this tangle."

"I wouldn't interpose an objection to that if you gave me your job," grinned Montrose. "I ain't got a thing on Murdock's daughter except these fingerprints and I can't prove she made them at the house any more than I can prove, yet, that Murdock had the gun in his library when Gusset was killed—except with the bullet that killed Gusset and fits the barrel of this same gun."

He went out as Roger Warren was announced.

CHAPTER XXXIX

DESTINY DONS A NEW MASK

THE time factor of ten thirty o'clock on this epochal morning did not alone concern Roger Warren and his appointment with the head of the Greater New York police department; it concerned others, among them:

Nirate Ned Marks, whose unconscious figure was being hurried to a hospital; Attorney Solomon Chatterton promptly arrested and taken to the West Sixty-Eighth Street police station, where he was detained as a material witness until the arrival and consideration of Nitrate's murder by Acting Inspector Raynor of the fourth inspection district; Audrey Murdock, still in her

cell at headquarters, where she had been left by Inspector Montrose, the victim of alternate trains of thought, owing to her arrest by Warren and the cryptic message he had sent her by the matron; James Murdock, whose boat was now nearing New York from Baltimore; Detectives Dean and Daniels, now both back in the city and with other men detailed by Montrose watching for his arrival at steamship and railway terminals.

It concerned Harry Gregory, sitting downstairs in another headquarters cell, thanking his stars that his shrewd partner had planned a bomb-proof alibi even for this remote eventuality of his arrest; Brownie Joe Goodman, for the first time in his devious career as a gang leader, caught with the goods, and plotting and planning how and where he would get a lawyer, and if the man behind whom he did not know, but whom he always called "Big Finger," would stand by him or abandon him; Mike the Maggot, then in conference with Ha! Ha! Benny Smart, who told him just enough of the crossing of Warren to set that wary crook tingling with alarm, and then with satisfaction at Benny's shrewd plan to "bump off that boob cop" when he came to visit Benny's hangout, as had been arranged.

It concerned the half-sobered widow, Edithe Winthrop, and her companion from the insurance company, en route to Deputy Commissioner Roxey's office to identify the recovered jewels and testify before the grand jury as to their true ownership when Brownie Joe was arraigned for receiving stolen property, following an indictment; and last, but by no means least Freddy Carrington, under his alias of King Tut, now wondering how he had ever gotten into a police cell and cudgeling his maple sirup brain fruitlessly for some remnant of memory that would explain it.

Finally he caught one clue. Freddy remembered that

he had met Audrey Murdock in the clutches of a police officer. The fellow's face was familiar. Yes, he was the same officer who had taken Freddy's name the night of Audrey's wild party. Also, he had been holding Audrey by the arm, Audrey was in evening dress, without a cloak, the night was chill, Freddy remembered pulling a "Sir Walter Raleigh" and placing his overcoat over the girl's shoulders despite admonitions to move on.

At ten thirty o'clock, as well, Freddy was moved on out of his cell to meet Inspector Montrose and Captain Marsh, with a stenographer, in the East Sixty-Seventh Street police station house, for these two men were keen to know more about Harry Gregory, especially since the latter had been arrested with Brownie Joe at Chatterton's house on Riverside Drive; and Mrs. Winthrop had been robbed, and, owing to Audrey's admissions to Montrose, that veteran officer now knew that Freddy Carrington wanted to kill Gregory! So Montrose wanted to know why Carrington had voiced this threat even while drunk and in custody.

All of these facts, and many others, while not yet fully known to the head of the police department, were known in part. He knew of the various arrests, and just as Roger Warren arrived the commissioner of police was hurriedly informed by Deputy Commissioner Roxey that Nitrate Ned Marks had been bumped off. So was Warren, since he had arrested that prisoner before Soapy Sol had procured Nitrate's release in heavy bond, now automatically exonerated by destiny and destiny's handy man, Benjamin Smart.

"Come in, Warren," said the commissioner of police when Roxey left to bring Harry Gregory to his own office on the floor below for a short interrogation. "You look tired. Well, things have been happening, from what Inspector Montrose says, and from what

Acting Inspector Raynor of the fourth district says, and from what Deputy Commissioner Roxey has just told me. What's the real dope on this arrest of Murdock's daughter, and what's the idea of booking her as Velvet Mary?"

"I sent Inspector Montrose to the silk office to get a pistol that was in Murdock's desk," continued the commissioner. "Did you know he kept a pistol with a silencer attached to it down there?"

"Mr. Murdock told me, the night I killed Gusset, that he had a police permit for a pistol, which I afterward identified by number, and Mr. Murdock also said that it was at his office. I did not know which of his offices it was in. I did not ask him. But my report shows that he told me that, and I think Inspector Montrose has the report."

"Inspector Montrose found Murdock's daughter's finger-prints on the gun, as well as Murdock's," went on the head of the department. "Have you any idea how her finger-prints might have come there? She was rather stiff with the inspector when he examined her, but he didn't mention to her where the pistol was."

"Yes, Mr. Commissioner, I think I can. Did Inspector Montrose say where he found the pistol—what drawer in the desk?"

"The upper right-hand drawer."

"I see how they might have come there. You see, Miss Murdock took a great fancy to my dog, Patrol. Bearing in mind your society entrée idea, I agreed to loan Patrol to her. It would provide me with an excuse, at an important time, perhaps, to return to Murdock's house to keep an eye on Gregory.

"Miss Murdock was so grateful for my saving her father's life that she asked me if she could get a new collar for the dog. I saw no objection. She had her

father get the collar the morning I called there to get a line on Gregory and the North River silk robbery. He came in with it while I waited for him. He put it in the right-hand upper drawer of his desk.

"When I went through the factory with him, Miss Murdock came back and asked him where the collar was. We were both downstairs. He told her. She may have fingered the gun when she found the collar, sir."

"I think that's the right guess," said the commissioner. "But your arrest to save her life, while legitimate enough, as a ruse, has put Inspector Montrose in a sort of a hole."

"I'm sorry. I was after that tip on the Winthrop robbery, Mr. Commissioner, or I would have explained things to the inspector. I felt that police business was paramount, even to the inconvenience of an innocent girl. I'm sorry for her, too. But I had no choice, as an officer of this department. I had to follow out every clue against Gregory—my hunch, you know!"

"You haven't got a thing to justify the charge of murder against Murdock's daughter, I take it?" said Warren's superior.

"No, sir."

"Didn't her father ask you to look after her while he went down to Washington? Inspector Montrose showed me his stenographic report of her examination, and the girl said she thought her father said something of the sort to you."

"Yes, sir."

"I guess we'll have to 'spring' the girl, Warren. But, just do this, will you?"

"Whatever you say, Mr. Commissioner, I'll do, if it's possible for me to do it."

"This will not be hard. Do not tell the girl why you arrested her just yet. Instead of that, tell James Mur-

dock when he gets back. If Murdock wants to tell his daughter, let him. But tell Murdock only enough to prove that you kept faith with him, even in a grave emergency. Tell him how you left your pistol in your overcoat pocket. Don't tell him about the rest of this police business; don't mention Benny Smart's name to him.

"Now, go down and spring the girl. Tell her that she's still in custody. Parole her in the custody of your dog. What's his name?"

"Patrol."

"She likes the dog. Let the dog guard her. Follow your hunch. Get this guy Gregory, or anybody else at whom the evidence points."

"I've got him locked up downstairs, Mr. Commissioner, right now. But Harry Gregory doesn't know that."

"You're wrong. Gregory's got another bomb-proof alibi. He went to Solomon Chatterton's house in response to a letter addressed to him which he had in his pocket when Acting Inspector Raynor's men grabbed him up in that lawyer's house. That letter concerns a piece of property that Chatterton owns. Roxey's looked it all up. That letter went through the United States mails to Harry Gregory at his home. How are you going to get over that hill?"

"I've got Leonard Grove up town in a cell as well. Molando, the president of the silk company to whom Gregory sold his own goods, is an ace in the hole. Grove blackjacked the pilot captain of that tug when the lighter was robbed in the North River job. He handed me a bump, too, last night."

"Gregory will never acknowledge that he knows Grove. Grove can't rap to Gregory, either. Even if he did, the fact that Grove was in the North River job

with Harold Yates and made his get-away on the launch with Yates, would make that reasonable doubt crop up before a trial jury. Go and spring this girl and take her down to the country home. By the way, Nitrate Ned has been bumped off."

"So I heard. I'll get the bird that did that, too. It was Benny Smart. The man's a homicidal maniac. I can get him any time I want to. He's got some stuff that will be useful to Inspector Montrose, I think. He's half brother to Gusset. It will establish the motive of Gusset for trying to kill Murdock."

The commissioner turned his head and looked out of the window lest this shrewd fellow see the light that flared into his eyes. His own plan was working out. Warren had told the commissioner the thing that the commissioner had told Montrose barely a half hour before—that he would get Warren to procure more proof of the Murdock murder.

"All right, Warren. Keep following your hunch. Get Gregory, get the bird that bumped off Nitrate, get 'em all. You're starting well, you're like a stake horse at the quarter-mile pole. Now, let me see you come under the wire!"

Roger Warren straightened and saluted.

CHAPTER XL

MASKS! MASKS! MASKS!

IT was not quite eleven o'clock when Roger Warren sent down the written order for Audrey Murdock's release, barely twelve hours since he had arrested her. Yet the ironic flight of time had made that interval to him gigantic, grotesque, tragic.

Simultaneously the steamship bearing James Murdock from Baltimore to New York arrived and docked. A hustling news vendor met disembarking passengers at the gangplank.

"All about the big robbery! Half a milyun in jools gone. P'lice in gun battle wit' bandits, two dead! Velvet Mary, old-timer, arrested! Poiper, sir?"

Murdock dropped a dime in his hand, glanced at the periodical, thrust it in his pocket and kept on up the pier. The name of his bookkeeper was a wholly unexpected pebble tossed up from the flotsam of past years on the fresh coast of a new and otherwise very enjoyable day. He was curious but not alarmed.

His smile did not relax as he caught a tramp taxicab, and from the corner of his eye saw Detectives Dean and Daniels, both looking rather fagged, take another from what they considered a discreet distance. On the contrary, his grin broadened.

He drove directly to his real estate and insurance office in an office building on lower Broadway, paid the chauffeur leisurely, strolled in more leisurely, stopped at the cigar stand to refill his case, and bowed to the elevator starter as if he were the mightiest financier in mighty Manhattan instead of merely the assiduous attendant who kept the vertical railways shooting up and down fast enough to accommodate three times the population of Springfield, Massachusetts, every office day.

Murdock was worrying about Messrs. Dean and Daniels less than he would fret if the vacuum cleaner that cleaned his office had leaked. If cops were boobs, that was the department's fault, not his. He said Hello! to his clerks, walked into his private office, leaving the door wide open, tossed the newspaper on his desk, hung up hat and coat, lit a cigar, and as Lieutenant Dean

came into the outer room, Murdock was unhooking his telephone and saying:

"Central, please give me police headquarters. Busy? Ring me as soon as you can get the line."

He hung up, smiled out at the puzzled sleuth, and cordially beckoned him in.

"Glad to see you, old man. Say, I left word at the Raleigh that I'd take the three o'clock express to New York. Came up in a cab and was almost at the gate when I remembered I'd left my ticket and reservation, besides some important papers in it. Ran back to get it. Found the cabby and got my duffle, but missed the train. That was the funniest bone I ever pulled. I was thinking about things in Washington and forgot everything else. Be with you in a minute. Oh, don't go out. Nothing private."

The bell tinkled. He picked up the receiver.

That was Murdock. Life was one alibi after another, but like a ring champion he never wasted one any more than a topnotch fighter prodigally wastes a blow. If the alibi he needed wasn't thought out months before, and circumstances deftly welded to verify it, he could improvise one under the nose of this detective who knew none would suffice—when Inspector Montrose closed in.

"Put on yer hat and wraps," smiled the matron to Audrey. "Detective Warren's got a discharge fer you. Yer a lucky girl. Anywan he helps is lucky fer he's a foine young cop."

Audrey came out of her dream. It was a very sweet one, yet the news was still sweeter.

"Nothing is too wonderful to be true."

The magic words had routed despair and replaced it by ecstasy. Memory of that rude, rough clutch of Patrolman Sanders melted and faded away. Gone were

the visions of Big Mag, the horrid hallucination of the Tombs. Her ordeal before Inspector Montrose was now merely a forgotten pool in a lake whose waters had vanished with the collapse of a dam—submerged, now, with the resurgence of a higher and vastly sweeter tide.

Her own innocence aided her emancipation, and her former pain blossomed into joy as night gives way to day. Most miraculous and merciful of all, the otherwise interminable time, each moment fraught with terror and torture of the first incarceration, dwindled to a pin point under the balm of her restored enchantment. She didn't yet know the reason for all her suffering, but her heart told her that it was good.

She kissed the matron to her vast astonishment and vaster pleasure. The iron door clanged. For her it was the chime of bells. She was in the corridor, and Roger Warren, his eyes shining like gleaming stars, stood waiting. She fairly ran to him, tucked her hand under his arm with a gesture that was a caress. The matron turned away and blew her nose.

"We'll go out the back way," said Warren. "Don't talk—at least just now."

He piloted her along a corridor. They emerged. A waiting cab with open door stood there. Audrey was about to get in when another whirled up and Edithe Winthrop with a slight but brainy looking man stepped out.

"Well, of all things? Where did you go last night? What are *you* doing here, Audrey?"

Suspicion, dislike, jealously tinged the queries. Warren tipped his hat.

"Miss Murdock and myself are going back to her country home. I had a little police business here and she waited for me. Sorry to have left you so unceremoni-

ously last night. Police business, you know, and as I promised Mr. Murdock to watch over his daughter, she came along, too."

Audrey caught her cue.

"Ring me up in the country," she smiled.

Mrs. Winthrop's look of astonished chagrin gave way to a subtle and knowing smile.

"Of course, my dear! I simply must have a chat with you and hear all about your—er—er adventures!"

The widow's mood was vibrating between hate for all cops since they had robbed her of her idol at the apartment house door and unholy happiness at Audrey's clandestine leaving and unexplained absence. Her puffy face carried traces of too much wine, her swollen eyelids gave her a piggish stare. Her smile had lost its charm.

Audrey and Warren rippled away in their cab.

Mrs. Winthrop and her escort, a jewel expert from the insurance company, slipped into the building. Her amazed chagrin gave way to a spasm of fresh infatuation as she discerned Harry Gregory, dapper and immaculate, cane in hand, descending the stairs which they were about to mount.

Gregory had been duly sprung by orders of the head of the department after a conference with Deputy Commissioner Roxey, following examination of a letter from Attorney Solomon Chatterton, inviting Gregory to call at his home regarding sale of a certain piece of property. "The deed's in Chatterton's name. I looked that up," said Roxey.

Roxey also tendered a perfunctory apology.

"It seems to be an unfortunate instance of your being in bad company, Mr. Gregory. The other man arrested when you were is a bad egg."

"I assure you, sir, that I bear no grudge." Gregory was suave and, having eaten the fruit of a Murdock alibi, found it good. "Mistakes may happen, but the police department saved my partner's life. Mr. Murdock and I have been in business for some years. He has been more like a father to me than a partner and his death would have been a cruel blow to myself, and even more dreadful to his daughter."

Roxey blinked. He was thinking of the last time he had seen the same young lady, of her admissions regarding Gregory, Mrs. Winthrop, and "King Tut," as well as of President Molando of another silk company who had occupied the same chair from which Gregory now rose.

"Quite so—I mean, of course, thank you," said Roxey.

"Why, *Harry!*" exclaimed Mrs. Winthrop. "Of all people. What are *you* doing here?"

The sinuous gentleman did not need to pretend surprise.

"Mrs. Winthrop! It is very good to see you again? Is this gentleman also a police officer?"

Her escort tendered a card silently.

"Can you imagine! I just met Audrey Murdock and Detective Warren, as I came in," said Mrs. Winthrop, with unctuous malice. "They're going down to the country place, it seems. Audrey must have spent the night—in town."

She drawled the last two words. Gregory bowed to hide his grimace. Her despicable implication was unmistakable. The thought that Audrey had disdained him and preferred this detested and dreaded cop gave his recent reverie in a cell a poignancy that his advance alibi was powerless to withstand.

"I've got to go to the Second Deputy Commissioner

of Police to identify some things of mine that were stolen when we were at supper, Harry. Come along, please. I'm all alone and the thought gives me shivers!"

"I've just been calling on Deputy Commissioner Roxey. He's a very courteous gentleman. Certainly I'll go with you."

Roxey felt that the world had lost at least three of its hinges when the trio entered. Gregory apologized for his intrusion.

"Mr. Gregory is a very dear friend of mine," gushed the widow. "We were at supper together when we—that is I—was robbed. Is it true that my jewels were recovered? I can hardly believe it."

"That is for you to say, madam." Roxey's tone was curt. Gregory's slimy audacity in trying to alibi, again, in the fortress of police detective business for all Greater New York was rather rubbing it in.

"I'll describe them," said the widow, smiling archly at her idol and speaking pensively to the police officer. "There was a lavalliere with a pendant, the chain had nine small but matched diamonds the pendant shaped like a small Greek cross, with four large, blue-white stones at either end and a rose diamond in the center.

"Then I had four very fine banquet rings, an engagement ring from my late husband specially imported by him from Holland. That was a carat and a half diamond. The pentagon brooch held nine stones and was white gold and platinum. Five stones at the five points, four within the pattern of two carats each and the center one was three carats. Then there was——"

She described them all fairly well. Roxey nodded. The jewels had not as yet been sent to the property clerk. He produced them in the celluloid container inside the cake of blue soap where Nitrate Ned's now stiffening fingers had placed them.

One by one the insurance appraiser scanned each through his powerful glass and checked them off on his memorandum. "No substitutions," said he. "They're the same ones we insured."

"You had better take them in charge," said Mrs. Winthrop. "They've brought me a lot of trouble." She sighed and glanced under her veil toward Gregory.

"Pardon me, madam." Roxey's tone was cold. "These are police evidence. The department must retain them until the men who robbed you are all indicted and convicted. The clerk will give you an official receipt."

"Why, the janitor said they had all been killed!"

"Janitors are not in charge of police investigations, Mrs. Winthrop. By the way, the District attorney has left a subpœna with me for you. If you wish, I'll send one of my own men with you to his office."

Harry Gregory left police headquarters, at last, with much less visible or invisible composure. The sudden death of Nitrate Ned Marks was another cruel blow for an Extra with flaming headlines launched itself under his eyes as he crossed the street.

He bought the paper. That was no crime, even if he was still under surveillance which he assumed. Nitrate's death so soon after Gusset's effort to Murdock was paralyzing. What if someone who had killed Nitrate—and escaped, according to the paper—should kill Murdock or himself?

"I'll get my gun, the one with the silencer at the silk office," he thought.

Then his glance caught the follow-up story of Velvet Mary's supposed arrest and he grew rigid with new fear. He did not dare go near the silk office. He read on. Some enterprising scribe had exhumed an old

photograph of Velvet Mary in the heyday of her life. It leered up at Gregory. Who had she murdered? Murdock? The paper did not say. He had not heard from Murdock for two days.

Sweat burst in drops on his forehead. He dared not go to or phone Mike the Maggot, since Velvet Mary had been arrested there—and by Detective Roger Warren!

Somewhere a clock chimed the half-hour. The bells of hell were ringing for Harry Gregory. Then he recalled the remark of Murdock that cops are boobs. It was a tonic for memory. Murdock was right, always right. He hailed a cab and started for the Broadway real estate office.

Murdock was seated at the desk telephoning as he came in, trying to coerce unwilling feet. A stranger was sitting near him, a grim sort of chap—another cop!

Murdock was just speaking:

"Police Headquarters? Give me the office of the Commissioner of Police, please. This is President James Murdock of the Murdock Silk Company. No, I have no appointment. Never mind what you think. Just tell him who is speaking. Thank you."

Murdock put his hand over the transmitter and grinned at his partner.

"Shake hands with Detective Dean, Harry. Mr. Dean, this is my partner in the silk business, Harry Gregory. I met Mr. Dean on the train while en route to Washington, Harry. He's a civil engineer by profession and a police detective by inclination!"

He became intent on the phone.

"Mr. Commissioner? I hope you'll excuse my intrusion. Has Detective Sergeant Warren been in this morning? I asked him to look after my daughter, Audrey—He was there with her a few minutes ago, but they've gone?—Oh, down to my country place, eh

—Thank you, so much, Mr. Commissioner—Yes, he's a fine chap—Well, I'll go down home and get his message as soon as I can—Just got in from Washington. Took a little rest by boat from Baltimore.—I'm very grateful for all the department has done and is doing for me, sir. Good day."

Wrath and chagrin almost turned Lieutenant Dean inside out.

"Friend of mine in Washington, who knows New York pretty well, said to me: 'Who was that man I saw you chatting with on the Capitol steps?' " said Murdock as he hung up the receiver. "I said: 'Why, that's a civil engineer by the name of Dean, from New York. Met him on the train.' And my friend, who's a treasury agent, he said: 'He may be engineering very civilly, but that's Detective Dean, of the New York Police Department. I see a buddy of his with him, but I don't know the other man.' He had the laugh on me, for I was just going in to see the Secretary of the Treasury."

He looked across the desk and laughed heartily. Dean had no reason to doubt the dexterous lie. He was very much discomfited. He could never prove it a lie any more than he could disprove Murdock's plausible yarn about forgetting his papers in the cab. But the second lie automatically revealed Murdock's purpose in not returning on the train. Dean was discomfited but not disheartened. He wondered what new villainy this consummate scoundrel was plotting?

"Can I be of any further service to you this morning?" blandly asked Murdock. "Or, my partner, Mr. Gregory? Always at the service of the police department, Mr. Dean, any time, night or day. It saved my life. I'm mighty grateful."

"Thank you, Mr. Murdock. No, I can't think of anything you can do for me. Good morning!"

Murdock smiled at his partner when Dean stumbled out of the front office.

"Boobs!" he jeered. "I left him tied to a post."

Gregory shook his head. His agitated finger pointed to the blazing headlines of his paper, the Nitrate Ned tragedy and the Velvet Mary photo, with her entire record neatly boxed, like a coffin of all their hopes and plans.

"I told you Warren was a boob," declared Murdock. "Lay you thousand to one he's pulled another bone. Prove it, right now."

He seized his telephone and called his silk office. Gregory rushed over to catch the reply. Mrs. Mallory's accents were unmistakable.

"Hello, Mary. I've just got back from Washington. Is everything all right over there? Mr. Gregory been down to-day?"

"Everything is O. K. I haven't seen Mr. Gregory."

"What's all this poster stuff in the newspapers?"

"It must be a mistake, sir. I don't understand it at all.

"All right. Oh, here comes Mr. Gregory, now. I'll be over with him in a little while. Did that check from the Molando firm come? Not yet?"

"So, youse see," said Benny Smart to Mike the Maggot, "dis wise boob cop is due fer de woiks."

He was nearing the end of a long, somewhat incoherent, and yet—in spots—wholly veracious story. Benny's crooked brain selected the soft spots with maniacal care.

"Nix," said Mike.

"It's a poipe. He's comin' to me hangout to-night, alone. I fed him de salve. Told him you'd morgue me if I went outa there, after he grabbed dat Velvet

Mary last night. He was goin' to grab me, too. Dat's why I had to lam, meet him, and salve him."

"What made him arrest your wife? What was she doing up here?" Mike's tone was suspicious, his frown heavy.

"Me wife? Ha! Ha! Why, youse big rummy! Where's *your* nut gone? Youse t'ink *I'm* wormy in de dome? I know youse got bats in de belfry when youse crab at me like dat. Me wife? Ha! Ha! Dis boob cop, Warren, don't know me wife from a cake of ice. Me wife's working, as per usual, down wit' de Murdock foim. Dis boob cop, he grabbed Murdock's gal, called *her* Velvet Mary, 'nd den he come after me in de check room. Dat's why I lammed outa yere. I had to get busy!"

"What!" The Maggot's face was livid.

"How many times have I gotta give youse de straight of dis? Mike, did youse ever know me to squawk? Did I ever peddle a bum steer? I'm tellin' youse dis was Murdock's daughter dat was nailed. Warren *t'ought* she was Velvet Mary. Don't dat prove him a boob?"

"What did he glom her for?" Mike's face was a fiend's in torment. If James Murdock heard his only daughter had been arrested here, it augured exceeding ill for the manager of the Versailles Supper Club.

"Youse kin soich me. He charged her wid moider! She comes in wit' dat Winthrop jane, the one that travels now 'nd den wit' High-Hat Gregory. He gloms de gal, de harness-bulls slam her in for moider. Den dis Warren, he beats it to meet me. I salves him good 'nd plenty. I tell him he's made a swell pinch. He tells me to lie low 'til to-night. I promise. Dat's why I know he's comin'."

"Why do you want him bumped off?" Suspicion dwindled to skepticism.

Benny Smart unfolded a paper. Bernard Gusset's face in death was shown in one illustration, another held Murdock's house.

"You know dis was me half brudder. Warren gunned him."

Mike nodded. His last doubt was gone, and Benny's private feud was sufficient proof that the old cab driver was on the level.

"How'll we git him? I might go myself. But, Benny, the woiks have gotta be set right. No blow-backs."

"We gits him in the alley when he comes to-night. He's comin' alone. De mob is in me wife's house. De get-away it t'rough de odder street. Put your own men on de job. Dey can tail any cop fer t'ree blocks away."

"Here's a century. Benny, you're there! I'm going to git busy right now."

Ha! Ha! Benny grasped the hundred-dollar bill. "I'll say we'll get him. He's one nawful boob!"

Mike hurried to the private telephone and called Murdock's offices. He had just left the Broadway one, and was en route to the silk warehouse. Murdock was still laughing.

"We'll get your coupé at the house and drive down in that," said Warren to Audrey when the cab left Center Street. "Dear heart, I can't tell you a thing—yet. It's all police business. But I may tell your father when I see him—part of it. Those are my instructions."

"I'll wait," said Audrey. "We'll both just wait and hope, won't we?"

"Yes. I'm very tired. Do you mind if I nap in your machine? I must have some sleep. Up all night. Must be back to meet a man early this evening. By the way, you're still my prisoner. I'm going to turn you over to Patrol. Promise me that he'll go with you everywhere."

"And you, too, when you can!" said she.

Warren dozed fitfully. Finally his head sagged into complete slumber. His hat fell off. His bandage was revealed. Audrey drew her little car smartly to one side of the boulevard and gazed at it in new alarm. It served to explain why he had not come back to her earlier.

She softly bent her head and kissed his face.

"Nothing is too wonderful to be true," she whispered softly as she drove on, her lover dropping into a sounder sleep.

Nothing is. That is why destiny changes its masks.

The clock was chiming high noon all around when destiny again shifted dominos. Two as yet unidentified bandits were dead. Nitrate Ned Marks was also just sprawling on the stroke of twelve, high noon, from all further ken of clocks or watches.

CHAPTER XLI

FROM THE KNOWN TO THE UNKNOWN

WHILE inspectors of the police department of New York are not, as a general rule, found personally following up clues to crimes which are committed in districts under their jurisdiction, nevertheless, both Inspector Montrose and Acting

Inspector Raynor found much that they felt necessitated their personal attention in the killing of Satchel Gusset and in the Winthrop robbery and subsequent murder of Nitrate Ned Marks.

Each of these men being responsible for conditions in his own inspection district, and each having been brought in personal contact with the two different crimes, it was logical that each should either in person or with capable subordinates continue to run out whatever meager clues remained despite all difficulties, discouragements, and swift-changing circumstances.

Montrose had clews. They were incomplete. He had followed out what he felt might be another promising sign in his examination of Audrey Murdock, while believing her to be Velvet Mary.

The signs disagreed when he compared Audrey's finger-prints with the old police record of the other girl. Montrose, therefore, immediately discarded the Audrey Murdock episode, but he did not hesitate for one moment in his pursuit of other evidence that would convict James Murdock.

"Hell's bells!" said Montrose to himself, with a brief, wry smile, as he laid down the old mug of the real Velvet Mary. He was not wroth, he was pleased, for he immediately recognized in that former police photograph of Mary Mallory the identical woman with whom he had talked in the office of Murdock's silk company when he procured the pistol owned by Murdock.

"I'm in luck," he told himself. "I'm going to nail him after all. I thought I was gone at first. But I'll nail him or I'll turn in my shield and start life all over again."

He dropped down to Deputy Commissioner Roxey's office, and the head of the detective bureau told him that there had as yet been no sign of James Murdock's re-

turn from the special corps of detectives who had been given a blanket notice to cover all the chief means of ingress into Manhattan—ferries, tubes, subways.

"But I've got his partner in the silk business downstairs," added Roxey. Then he told of Harry Gregory's arrest with Brownie Joe Goodman at the home of Attorney Solomon Chatterton, on Riverside Drive, by Inspector Raynor's detectives from the other district.

"Thank you," said Montrose. "That helps me a little. Have you any dummy cartridges around here that will fit an automatic pistol of .320-caliber? They've got to look like the real thing, and they've got to explode when the gun is pulled, but I don't want any one that this particular gun is pointed at to sustain any injury. Those plumbago fillers, painted with aluminium—they look the real thing, and they blow into a black cloud when the cartridge explodes."

Roxey didn't have any, but within the hour one of the handy men in the detective bureau had improvised a set of cartridges with plumbago in lieu of bullets that had the complexion of the real thing. Before coating with aluminium sufficiently to give them a dull finish, they would have done excellent duty inscribing addresses on a packing case for Murdock's silk firm—or any other—since they were fabricated from black crayons.

Montrose carefully plucked the genuine cartridges from the Murdock pistol with the silencer attached and substituted the others. He had three men identify this pistol by its manfacturer's serial number, its model, and its caliber.

Then he called a departmental automobile and whirled out to the Murdock silk factory, just before Harry Gregory was sprung. He went in and tipped his hat to the real Velvet Mary and smiled genially.

"I've come to bring back this pistol," said he, after they were inside Murdock's private office with the outer door closed. "I took it over to headquarters, and Mr. Murdock has a perfect legal right to have it, for he has a permit. I was mistaken in an idea I had about it. So I thought I'd just bring it back again, you can put it in the drawer of his desk, just the same as if I hadn't called—and no one but you and I will ever be the wiser, eh? What people don't know don't worry them!"

Mrs. Mallory's face broke into a smile as she unlocked the drawer.

"Ain't it the truth?" she remarked. "Youse was so kind to me that I jest felt I had to keep my word, but I was worryin' what might happen if Mr. Murdock missed it. He ain't been back to the office since you took it."

The tinkle of the telephone broke in.

The woman seized the instrument and answered the two questions James Murdock was asking from his real estate office. Then she hung up.

"That's him now," said she. "He's over to one of his other offices. I don't know which one, fer he didn't say. But he did say that him and Mr. Gregory was coming over here."

"I'll bid you good morning, then," said Montrose with another swift smile. "Remember—if you ever need a friend, Inspector Montrose will try and return this favor."

"I'll remember," said she, her cloud of perpetual timidity fleeing before her smile. "Some of youse cops is real men!"

Her words haunted him. He knew now she was an old-timer, and as he sped back to his own headquarters at the East Sixty-Seventh Street station, with traffic stopped each way at all intersecting streets to allow him

free passage, he wondered at her words. Then he remembered that Warren had once arrested her; that Velvet Mary had impudently referred to him as "a good-looking cop," and the whim of the feminine mind seemed both sentimental and grotesque. The memory of the good old days when this woman had been the uncrowned queen of the Brownie Joe gang at the Old Mill was a shadow more real than substance.

Police officers have little time for sentiment, and Montrose left his unusual mood in the machine when he regained his office. He had been on duty for almost thirty hours without sleep. He ordered coffee, lighted a cigar, and received the report of Lieutenant Dean on the telephone as to his encounter with Murdock in the latter's real estate office.

"Bully for you boys!" smiled Montrose. "Nothing to cry over, at all, lieutenant. Now you and Daniels both get some sleep. To-night, at ten o'clock, I want you to go down town."

Swiftly he described the street, number, and apartment number of Mrs. Mary Mallory's residence in the almost forgotten section of Manhattan. It was the front entrance to the same building which Roger Warren had reached through a rear alley and a side entrance from the opposite side by a stairway, but Inspector Montrose did not know that. He told them to cover it and keep him posted.

All he knew was that Velvet Mary Mallory was an employee of James Murdock and Harry Gregory; that Mike the Maggot, now Michael LeMar, was also a former member of the old Brownie Joe Goodman gang at the Old Mill; that Mike now ran the Versailles Supper Club in Montrose's own inspection district; Montrose had asked Captain Marsh to detail Sanders to personally watch who came in and out of that luxurious vulture's

nest; that Roger Warren, had arrested Murdock's daughter and charged her with murder in that same supper club the night before.

Knowing these things, Inspector Montrose knew there must be some as yet undisclosed link between them. He next ordered the prisoner who had been booked as King Tut to be brought in and a stenographer summoned.

Thus the first of three main converging lines of evidence which the police department finally gathered against the chief vulture of the dark assumed definite, tangible form before the disheveled figure of Freddy Carrington appeared.

CHAPTER XLII

"KING TUT" IS SPRUNG

"BEFORE I talk with you," said Inspector Montrose, "I want to inform you that you may legally refuse to reply to any question I ask. In that event I can only send you to court and put the various charges against you up for a judicial decision. By the way, isn't your name Frederick Carrington?"

"It is. May I awsk with whom I have the honor to be speaking?"

"I am Inspector Montrose."

"I regret, Inspector, that I must meet you officially. Never mind the technicalities. I appreciate your courtesy. But my head feels as if several pyramids were resting on it. Could I beseech you for a bromo seltzer, and also awsk if anything of this affair has gotten into the morning papers—my arrest, I mean?"

Montrose sent for a surgeon who gave Carrington a sedative.

"Yes, the papers this morning say that King Tut's sarcophagus has as last been reached, and that the coffin is covered with solid gold," said the inspector, dryly. "How did you find your sarcophagus?"

"It might have been worse. Good Lord! This will kill the mater."

"The who?"

"My maternal ancestor—my mother!"

"I don't seem to remember who King Tut's mother was," said Montrose facetiously. "My knowledge of ancient Egyptian dynasties is rather limited."

Freddy almost collapsed. Then he launched into a New York Dutch pedigree that was a marvel. In two jumps he was at Washington's Irving's period, in two more he was climbing across the old stockade at Wall Street, built to keep the Indians of early historic Manhattan out of the baby colony of New Amsterdam; he lightly rapped the wooden leg of Peter Stuyvesant, its governor, and he was swimming out toward Henry Hudson's "Half Moon," when Montrose cried:

"Whoa, January! Young man, I've been up all night because of things connected with your arrest. Let's talk about them."

"Very well, sir, I'm entirely willing. I just wanted you to know that it will be a terrible shock to the family pride of my mother!"

"I'm a father of five myself," dryly replied the officer, "and I can sympathize with your more immediate ancestors, since my own family is getting stranger to me every tick of the clock. How long have you known Audrey Murdock?

Freddy told him. Something like six months and they had been good pals at various social functions. He described how Audrey had engaged him to stage some-

thing unique for her wild party and told of the Egyptian idea and of his fee, one thousand dollars.

"You met Harry Gregory socially, too?"

"Rawther more alcoholically than socially," discriminated Freddy. "He doesn't belong. Commercial sort. I dislike him, first for himself and more violently for his interference with my courtship of Mrs. Edithe Winthrop."

"Does she belong socially?"

"Oh, no, sir. She's *nouveau riche*. But I have a very great liking for the lady."

He fumbled in his pockets and produced a florist's bill for the orchids he had sent her the day before. Montrose looked at it.

"You were hunting Gregory last night to kill him—with this gun?" He produced the small-caliber revolver.

Freddy paled. "Yes, sir," said he firmly. "I had every idea of shooting him on sight, because I believe his intentions toward the lady of my heart are distinctly dishonorable."

Montrose pricked up his ears.

"Why?" he bluntly asked.

"He doesn't care for her, but she's infatuated with him. He's in love with Miss Murdock, but Miss Murdock doesn't care for him."

"Well, who does Miss Murdock care for?"

"I don't know, sir. But I am sure she is not fond of Gregory. She's too young to know her own mind."

"You were looking for Gregory last night, and also Mrs. Winthrop?"

"Yes, sir. Mrs. Winthrop's maid told me over the phone that her mistress had gone to the Versailles Supper Club to dawnce with Gregory, and the maid said she

herself had a night out. I started for the Versailles Supper Club, but I met Miss Murdock on the street. She was very thinly clad and was shivering. I do not remember just how it happened, but I do remember putting my topcoat over her and the officer objected. I think that was how I came to be arrested."

"Why was Miss Murdock in an officer's custody?"

"I have no idea, sir. I—I—well, I was rawther more than half-seas over, I imagine."

"You have a good imagination, young man. You were. Now this is a pretty bad kettle of fish. You are charged with being drunk and disorderly, public intoxication, interfering with an officer in the discharge of his duty, threatening to kill, possession of a firearm contrary to the Sullivan law, and resisting arrest!"

"Good heavens!" Freddy Carrington collasped as if all the pyramids had fallen upon him at once. "Really, sir, I can say nothing, nothing at all—except I hope you'll break the news to mother as gently as possible. Of course, we're rawther well-to-do, as such things go, and I imagine mother would be very shocked if I had managed to hit it off and married Mrs. Winthrop—perhaps worse shocked than she will be at this bad news. Do you think I ought to enter a plea of temporary insanity, due to love and cocktails?"

"I'm a police officer," gruffly returned Montrose, "not your legal adviser. I suppose you can give bail if I send you down to court? Wait a minute."

He went out. He didn't want King Tut to see him laugh. It was such an absurb contrast to his former prolonged effort to get at the truth of things that it irresistibly excited his sense of the ridiculous. Carrington was just a plain, ordinary society chappie, not a vulture at all and there was no particular gain to the police

department by wasting their time putting him over the jumps either in court or out of it.

Montrose consulted a copy of "Who's Who in America" and quickly verified the young man's mother's name and residence. Her list of society and club affiliations was imposing. Her son was not a criminal, just a sap. He went back into the room.

"The maximum penalties for all the charges, if pressed and if convictions resulted, would aggregate nearly twenty years," said he grimly. "Now, I'm going to do something that, perhaps, I haven't a legal right to do. But you've told me the truth. That's something. I'm going to let you go, for a week, on your own recognizance. A man with a family tree like yours isn't going to run away, is he?"

"Oh dear, no. I give you my word I will not."

"You will be under constant police surveillance and must avoid intoxicants. Do you have the entrée to the Versailles Supper Club?"

"Yes, sir. I had a card when I was arrested."

"It will be returned to you at the desk. If I were giving advice, which I'm not," continued Montrose, "I should go there or to Mrs. Winthrop's home or Mr. Murdock's or elsewhere, socially, but say nothing whatever about this arrest. Try to keep on a more even keel. Just between us, I'm trying to help you out of a bad hole. Maybe you wouldn't mind helping me, in return, if sometime I asked a little aid from you."

"Inspector, I assure you that I did not expect this consideration. I am chawmed to meet you—even under such distressing circumstances. I will endeavor to remember all that you have said and be guided accordingly."

"Noblesse oblige!" murmured Montrose sleepily. "Come back in a week and tell me your adventures."

CHAPTER XLIII

AGAIN, FROM THE KNOWN TO THE UNKNOWN

IN the meantime Acting Inspector Raynor, who had gone down town when his men had arrested Harry Gregory and Brownie Joe Goodman at the home of Attorney Solomon Chatterton, hurried back to his own inspection district headquarters to cope with the new problem that the murder of Nitrate Ned Marks had created. Totally unexpected, Benny Smart had made a clean get-away. The traffic officer who had rushed to Nitrate after he was shot through the body could only summon an ambulance, detain the attorney, and rush the victim to surgical and medical assistance at the nearest hospital. Chatterton, being with his client near Ninth Avenue and a little north of the precinct dividing line, now found himself in the West Sixty-Eighth Street police station, detained as a material witness and a potential suspect for the crime of killing his own client.

Chatterton, despite his vehement protests, was promptly locked up to await the Acting Inspector's orders. The blow-offs during the Winthrop job of the night before, the wounding of two uniformed men, the sense of tremendous and continually impending peril in the operations of gunmen, bandits, and the general brood of vultures of the dark—and, daylight too, in this instance—was such that Chatterton might as well have addressed his remonstrances to the Sphinx. He went into a cell with scant ceremony, still arguing.

Raynor immediately telephoned to the hospital. One of the two police officers on guard at the beside of the dying man reported that he was still unconscious.

"Stay with him. Note anything he says. He may mention the name of the assassin before he passes out," said Raynor. "Ask the surgeons and nurses to cooperate with the department. They can't save him, you say?"

"Not a Chinaman's chance, Inspector. The bullet went through and through. He's an old man and the internal hemorrhage couldn't be stopped before they started to operate. He's on the table now."

Raynor summoned Chatterton to his room. The attorney came in, sullen, defiant.

"Sit down!" said Raynor. "I want to ask you how Nitrate Ned came to be shot."

"Don't you dare try any of your infamous third degree methods on me," shouted the irate attorney. "I'll have those buttons taken off you—if you do."

"The buttons," said Raynor, fingering them thoughtfully, "may be taken off by the Commissioner of Police without your request, if I don't get to the bottom of this killing. And there's a little button—or, maybe it's a switch, yes, I think it's a switch—in a room at Ossining, where you may have a personal interest, later if I can't hang this killing on the man who did it."

"Threatening me, eh? Meaning you'll try to hang it on me? You're a fool! Why, I just got the man out on bail."

"I may be a fool, but I wasn't with him when he was killed. You are an officer of the Supreme Court. I'm only a cop. If you want to refuse the police department information, that's your privilege. Sergeant, take this gentleman back into a cell and charge him with the murder of Nitrate Ned Marks. If he wants an attorney, send for one."

"Come on!" The officer addressed seized Chatterton's arm.

That gentlemen suddenly saw what is commonly referred to as a great light. He jerked away and resumed his chair.

"I'm not refusing the police department any information," said he. "I'm merely resenting your truculent attitude. What is it you want to ask me?"

"I want an answer to my first question. How did Nitrate Ned come to be shot?"

"I don't know."

"Did you hear any report?"

"I did not."

"Where were you and he?"

Chatterton described the locality. It conformed to the temporary report on the inspector's desk.

"Was the murderer in that alley?"

"If he was I didn't see him. He may have been. Won't the direction of the bullet wound indicate?"

"We don't perform police autopsies on men until after they're dead," said Raynor coldly. "Nitrate Ned was just alive when I telephoned the hospital. Do you have any idea of any one who would be interested in killing him?"

"I haven't seen the poor old chap—until this morning—for months and months. He was working, as you heard me tell the magistrate."

"Yes," said Raynor thoughtfully, "I heard you tell the magistrate, but I don't remember hearing you tell him the name of the firm or what town in New Jersey it was located in. There's just a chance, you know, some one from that factory may have been mixed up in this—if you were not."

Chatterton stared. "Inspector Raynor, you can't believe that I'd bail a man out and then kill him, or have him killed? It's absurd."

"Attorney Chatterton, I couldn't believe that you'd

have a man call at your house with all the stolen Winthrop diamonds and let my men nail him there. But while I couldn't, yet I got Brownie Joe with all those sparklers while you were in court trying to spring Nitrate. You sprang him. Somebody shot him. Where did he work in New Jersey?"

Counsellor Chatterton groveled. He stood an excellent chance of being disbarred if his professional ethics were scrutinized too closely, and that would mean ending the fat fees he received from such vultures as the police department haled into court at various times.

He entered an immediate disclaimer, to protect his professional standing.

"I assume you refer, Inspector, to Joseph Goodman?"

"Your assumption will stand the acid test, counsellor."

"He has been a client of mine often. He may have telephoned my office and found I hadn't come down there. That was probably why Joe came to my house."

"Undoubtedly, my dear counsellor. But if he'd gone to your office I'd have nailed him there with two other men of mine. So it's rather fortunate and unfortunate—either way you look at it—that you happened to be on hand to bail out Nitrate. Now, once more—third and last call—where did Nitrate Ned work in New Jersey?"

"Give me the suburban telephone directory, inspector. I can locate the firm easily. It's been almost five years since I went over there to intercede for him."

Mr. Chatterton's teeth chattered as he ruffled the leaves. He pointed to the name: "Bosanquet, Barnum & Co., manufacturing chemists, Hoboken."

"You're sure?" demanded Raynor. "It means a good deal to you, you know."

"Quite sure." Chatterton's mien was more confident. "May I be discharged, Inspector?"

"I'm sorry, counsellor. Not just yet. Police business is rigorous, you know. You ought to know. Many's the time you've found a flaw in the way we handle cases. I can't afford to allow any in this matter." He ran his fingers lightly down the buttons on his blouse. "I want to keep these for a little while, if I can, and the commissioner of police is a rather exacting superior, I can assure you."

Chatterton almost collapsed.

"I've got to go back to the cell?"

"I'm afraid you have, counsellor. You're a very needful material witness, you know—an eyewitness."

"The law permits bail for homicide witnesses when they have a standing such as mine."

"We didn't have a thing but suspicion on your standing, professionally, before we got Brownie Joe with the goods!" said Raynor smilingly. "I'm afraid that the courts might be inclined to censure the commissioner of police for laxity—you know the courts are sometimes rather critical of the way his high ranking subordinates conduct their duties—if I allowed you to walk out on bail. To-morrow, counsellor, I'll take you before the same magistrate you appeared before on Nitrate's behalf this morning." He broke off at a rap on the door. "Come in!"

The traffic officer who had arrested Chatterton when Nitrate Ned Marks went down on the sidewalk with the bullet from Benny Smart's borrowed gat through his feeble old body, stepped in and saluted.

He walked to the desk, stooped, whispered.

"Nitrate Ned is dead, sir. Just before he died he partially recovered consciousness. The surgeon said to him: 'Who shot you? Nitrate started to give a name. He said: 'Sol Chat—' and then, sir, he died."

He saluted and withdrew.

Inspector Raynor conveyed the information he had just received to Attorney Chatterton, adding: "You see how I'm fixed, counsellor?"

"Nonsense! That statement isn't admissible in evidence against me, and you know it. When a man or woman's ante-mortem statement is taken, he or she must be told that death is inevitable; must believe it or acknowledge being told death is certain—but after hearing the statement that death is inevitable, the dying person must then reply to a question asking who injured him or her," fumed the attorney.

"The courts," said Inspector Raynor, "will pass on those technicalities when you are arraigned. The charge of murder stands until I get evidence to show somebody else killed Nitrate Ned Marks. Concentrate, counsellor, and aid me with your thoughts."

He thumbed his push button. An officer appeared.

"Take this prisoner to a cell and hold him, incommunicado, for twenty-four hours. Then I'll arraign him. Book him for murder."

Raynor was within the law. His men had searched the vicinity for signs of a weapon. They had found none. The traffic officer who came said that Nitrate Ned had been on the sidewalk for at least five minutes before he arrived. In five minutes five pistols might have been spirited away by five confederates. Soapy Sol Chatterton was thus mired down in his own well-laid schemes—too well laid, thanks to Detective Sergeant Roger Warren.

But this circumstance, while of the utmost importance in keeping James Murdock from communicating with Chatterton, and also making sure that Brownie Joe was not haled out of headquarters by a writ of

habeas corpus procured by the same wily attorney now himself in a cell was nothing at all compared to the results of Raynor's next step.

He summoned Detective Hartley, one of the men who arrested Brownie Joe and Harry Gregory.

"Go to this address," said he, giving him the memorandum of Bosanquet, Barnum & Co., Hoboken. "Be careful. Don't spill the beans. Find out, if you can, if Nitrate Ned Marks worked there, how long, what his salary was, what he did to earn it, and if he ever had any quarrel with any one that was employed there. Don't bother with any New Jersey police officers. Get over there, get this information and any other that you can, and get back here as quickly as you can with all of it. If I'm not here, I'll leave word where to reach me."

Raynor, like Montrose, was after the truth, and refused to be balked or discouraged. His clews were scanty. He ran them out, and like his associate of the same rank, with astonishing results.

CHAPTER XLIV

AND BACK TO THE KNOWN

THE curve of a criminal's thoughts, however long, however devious, must, sooner or later, be intercepted by men who think and act in a straight line.

The final arc to a circle of crime, planned with foresight, ingenuity, precision, and concealed with most vigilant care, was now being planned by James Murdock to be completed by his most marvelous coup of all.

This circle was to end with a theft of such colossal

magnitude that it would appear Napoleonic. Murdock's Washington visit was one of the needful preparations. His absence had brought complications, but they did not all immediately appear in his sphere of knowledge on his return. He was supremely confident, thoroughly at ease, and his grin at Harry Gregory across his desk in his real estate office following Detective Dean's exit, was founded in the undeniable fact that, so far, he had baffled and outwitted the police department at every turn—and for almost fifteen years.

Until the death of Bernard Gusset there had been no fact disclosed to indicate that James Murdock was a criminal. His superskill in leaving false trails, in relentlessly committing his poor pawns to death or imprisonment when they fell, his wary caution in always having an alibi that would stand up had until now kept him immune from the grip of the law. Many of his minor dupes had been apprehended and punished, but Murdock was unscathed.

While James Murdock schemed, the officials of the police department reasoned. Roger Warren had reasoned and had won—a footing! Montrose was reasoning that he might procure some clew to Murdock from the home address of the real Velvet Mary; Raynor was reasoning that he might get some clue to the murderer of Nitrate Ned Marks from the firm whom Chatterton asserted had employed him.

Slight as these last two clues appeared, each became a cable stronger than steel—although in ways not possible for the most seasoned veteran of the police department to imagine or foresee. What the police department that day lacked, James Murdock, schemer and criminal, promptly supplied without being in the least aware that he was doing aught but completing the curve to his astonishingly conceived, newest criminal plan.

"Well," said Murdock, "suppose we take a run over to the silk office and then have lunch. Wait till I order the car brought down. We're going out of town."

"Down in the country?" asked Gregory.

"Somewhere else," cryptically returned Murdock, "and then we'll go down there. I want to get the message the commissioner of police left with Warren. Nice chap, Warren." He grinned.

"I've got something to tell you about him," said Gregory, "but I'll wait until we're in the car."

Murdock phoned for his limousine to be brought down from the Fifth Avenue residence to the silk office. Gregory and he took a cab over to the place where Inspector Montrose had recently been and more recently left.

"Hello, Mary!" said Murdock. "I see somebody's been giving you some free advertising. I wonder how that happened?"

"I ain't got no idea. I was at home all night. I 'most dropped dead when I saw my face in the papers this morning. I guess that cop that was here with you the other day musta made a mistake. It was Detective Roger Warren arrested some girl uptown somewheres. I never been near any of them swell dumps for years 'nd years. I been livin' decent."

Murdock chuckled. "So you have, Mary, so you have; and if anybody says you haven't, I'll swear to a five-year bomb-proof alibi, and so will Mr. Gregory. I'd like to see any cop bust it, too."

Gregory was fumbling in the drawer of his desk. He got up with an oath.

"I had a gun in here—an automatic with a silencer on it," said he angrily. "Where is it?"

Velvet Mary did not appear perturbed. Gregory's scowl was usually enough to throw her into a spasm of

fear, for Gregory had something on her, since Mary, when a leather-lifter in the good old days, had once picked Gregory's pocket.

"Sure you had a gun there," said she quietly. "But I remember when Mr. Murdock told you to write in and get a police permit to have one, and you never dictated the letter to me. When that cop was nosing around here, I suspicioned he might be trying to get something on you. When he went away I took that gun over to my house. I wasn't going to let some cop get the goods on people that's paying me salary every week! If you want that gun, I'll go over and get it. But if I was you I wouldn't pack a gun around, not with the cops nosin' in and out of my place of business, without a permit."

"She's dead right," said Murdock. "Harry, you must be more careful in details. Now, I've got a gun, right here in my desk. At least it was here when I went away."

He unlocked the drawer. The self-same gun that Montrose had stripped of its lethal power, much as a Hindu pulls the fangs of a cobra, was nestling in its place. Murdock rummaged in another drawer and produced his permit. Then he looked at his partner. "Why do you want to be packing a gun, Harry? I don't pack mine around. I leave it here."

"I'll talk that over with you later," said Gregory, frowning.

"Well, if you think you need a gun, I'll take mine along with us, and the permit, too."

Suiting the action to the word, Murdock dropped the weapon in one pocket and carefully tucked his permit in his wallet.

"That check from the Molando Silk Company hasn't come, you said," went on Murdock to the woman.

"All the mail is here, sir. I haven't opened any of it. I didn't see any letter from them."

Murdock dictated a letter. It was curt and business-like. He recited the fact of the delivery of the silk and asked an immediate remittance or he would be forced to "take legal action." Gregory signed it.

"I'll have to get in touch with Sol Chatterton," said he, "and have him look after that matter if they don't come across."

"I want to talk to you about Chatterton, too," said Gregory, "when we take our drive. The car's here."

"Well, we'll go to lunch."

"There was a gentleman phoned in, sir, just before you come," said Velvet Mary from her typewriter. "Gave the name of Mr. LeMar. Said he must get in touch with you immediately. Most important."

"Did he leave any number?" asked Murdock.

"No, sir."

"H-m. I don't place him. If he wants me very bad, and calls again, tell him to call me on the telephone at Bosanquet, Barnum & Co., chemists, in Hoboken. I'm going over there to meet Mr. Bosanquet—that is, if he's home. He's been abroad."

Even here Murdock was deftly laying his inevitable alibi.

Velvet Mary wrote down the name and telephone number. "I'll tell him, sir, if he calls again," said she.

Gregory had no idea that LeMar was Mike the Maggot, nor that he was one of the old mob at the Old Mill; nor did Gregory know that Murdock was LeMar's partner. Murdock didn't keep all his eggs in one basket! Velvet Mary Mallory knew Mike better than Murdock, but she kept that fact—with many others of her former lurid career—to herself.

The two men went to lunch and then their machine

struck north, crossed the Forty-Second Street ferry, and wended its way from Weehawken to Hoboken. En route, Harry Gregory showed Murdock the newspaper item of Nitrate Ned's death, and told how he had also been arrested with Brownie Joe and later sprung owing to Murdock's foresight in planning the advance alibi which on its face accounted for his presence at Chatterton's house.

Murdock grinned. "You see, Harry, it pays to be foresighted. I told you before I went away that I was through with all of this pretty stuff."

"Wait until I get done," said Gregory darkly. He swiftly recited the awful blow-back in Nitrate's failure to get the Winthrop jewels out of his own hands and into Gregory's when Gregory returned with the widow after the robbery.

"That Sergeant Snyder," said Gregory, "he saved me. One more minute and your dear friend, Roger Warren, would have had me, and had me right. He was wedged in the corner of the stairway, waiting for me, and I saw him out of the tail of my eye as I lighted a cigarette. He was in evening dress, and his face was in the shadow, but I'd know his shoulders among those of a million.

"What was Warren doing there? Didn't I tell you he was trying to get something on us when he came over to your house the other day? I saw him leaving the Versailles Supper Club in a cab, with Audrey, too, and she was supposed to stay there with Mrs. Winthrop. I didn't see Audrey, but I'm sure she was in the cab with him.

"Now, listen to this: Just after I leave police headquarters, I meet Mrs. Winthrop coming in to identify her jewels. Nothing will do but I must go back to Roxey's office with her. And Mrs. Winthrop said she'd

just met Warren and Audrey at police headquarters. What was Audrey doing down there?"

Murdock smiled. "Why, you poor simpleton, I asked Warren to look out for her while I was away. He was keeping his eye on her to see that nothing happened to her. Didn't the Commissioner of Police tell me over the telephone that Audrey had been there with Warren—before you told it to me, when I called him up to throw a harpoon into that smart-alec cop, Dean, that I left tied to a post down in Washington?"

Gregory shook his head. "I wanted that gun of mine to shoot that cop," said he. "He thinks he saved your life. You know he didn't. You owe him nothing because you saved your own life—but Gusset can't tell that! I'm going to bump off that Warren before he spills the beans for everybody.

"Think of it—a quarter million dollars' worth of diamonds and pearls gone. The two inside men bumped off, Nitrate Ned killed after he got out on bail, and Brownie Joe in the cell at headquarters, caught with the stuff on him. I tell you that this cop Warren was back of the whole grab. That's why he left the Supper Club. I saw him leaving. He was in evening dress when he left, he was in evening dress when I saw him huddled in that corner of the stairway landing!"

"Forget the job," said Murdock, impatiently. "It was a tought break and, as you say, I don't owe Warren anything. But he's been handy, so far. If he's getting dangerous, we'll let someone else handle him. Harry, one of my cardinal rules is never to commit a crime of violence. I owe my success largely to that.

"Now, brace up. I'm going to show you a job worth while. My boy, we're going after two hundred millions in gold bullion. We're going to get it and the boobs

that are going to handle it will never know how the trick was turned.

"Then we're going for a nice sea voyage in the *Clothos*. The winter's coming on. We'll drop down along the coast and cruise through the Caribbean. We may go to Rio Janeiro and Buenos Aires. I think Audrey needs a sea-voyage for her health and you shall be one of the party. How does that strike you?"

"Fine," beamed Gregory, as the car stopped in front of the long building bearing the sign: "Bosanquet, Barnum & Company, Manufacturing Chemists."

Murdock stepped out and so did Gregory.

Simultaneously, Detective Hartley of Acting Inspector Raynor's staff was passing in a street car. He was looking at the building and making ready to leave the car when, before his incredulous eyes, he saw one of the men he had arrested that same morning over in Manhattan in Attorney Chatterton's house on Riverside Drive step out of the limousine, following a larger and portlier man whom Hartley had never seen before.

Detective Hartley changed his mind about stopping at the front door of the factory. Instead, he noted the license number of the stately limousine, kept on up the road a long block, left the car there, and then dodged back along the high board fence that hedged in the property and stalked the factory from the rear.

Hartley was rated a fairly good detective. Raynor was relying on him for information regarding Nitrate Ned Marks. Nitrate had been killed after being released on bail and Brownie Joe Goodman and Gregory had been nailed by Hartley during the court proceedings before Ned was released.

"What's Gregory doing here?" Hartley asked himself.

CHAPTER XLV

"NAPOLEON" DISCLOSES HIS GRAND STRATEGY

"IS Mr. Bosanquet in?" asked Murdock of the pretty stenographer and bookkeeper inside the office, as blandly as if he did not know that gentleman was a myth of his own fecund brain, never seen but at long intervals, and then when Cobden, his ostensible country house butler impersonated the part with an excellent beard.

"No, sir, he's still abroad. But he wrote the superintendent that he expected to be back soon," said the girl.

"Thank you. Well, I'm Mr. Murdock, one of the directors. May I speak with the superintendent?"

"Mr. Marks hasn't come over yet, to-day. But I remember you, sir, from the last meeting of the board of directors. Is there anything I can do for you, sir?"

Murdock meditated. "I wrote from New York, two weeks ago, that I'd be over," said he. "I wanted to learn how things are getting along."

The girl nodded. "I got your letter and showed it to Mr. Marks. We haven't been very busy. Mr. Marks laid off most of his employees a few weeks ago for the market for toilet goods is slow. But he's been working on some new processes and wants to show them to Mr. Bosanquet and the directors at the next quarterly meeting."

"Thank you." Murdock meditated again. "Well, if there's no objection, since Mr. Marks hasn't come over to-day, just make a memorandum that I called, and I'll take a look around the factory—now that I'm here."

The girl gave him the keys. Murdock unlocked the

door to the big structure, which had been one of many "war-bride" concerns and which he had bought for a song after the conflict. All the girl had told him he already knew. But his mien was that of the staid but thorough man of affairs, looking over the details of an investment with other men.

He had no associates in this enterprise save Cobden and Marks. Marks was gone. Cobden was miles away. Marks was a useful figurehead. Murdock's bubble company by employing Marks posed as a philanthropic concern; the pretence at manufacturing brought such things as the real business of the firm necessitated—nitric acid and other ingredients of explosives or compounds devised by Marks. These jobs were profitable. The Winthrop robbery was the first failure to net anywhere from five to fifty thousand per cent profit and Nitrate was well content to draw his stipend, while being safely sheltered under the aegis of the all-powerful Murdock.

Until now, Harry Gregory had never known of this concern save indirectly. He walked through the shipping room, past rows of toilet preparations, many of which had been sold off in casual markets and at a price which moved them quickly, since the concern was not seeking profit but using the establishment as a camouflage for predatory operations carried out in Greater New York and other cities, chiefly the former.

At a room with reinforced walls, marked "Laboratory —Keep Out!"—Murdock produced another key from his pocket. He opened this door and Gregory followed him within. The original equipment was still present for research work and so was the apparatus Nitrate Ned Marks had added for his own peculiar fields of experiment.

At one side stood a long row of canes and umbrellas,

each upright. The fact was a quaint one for what purpose they could serve puzzled Gregory. Murdock noticed his perplexed look at them.

"You wouldn't think, would you, that there is the little secret to picking up two hundred millions in gold bullion without the chance of a back-fire?"

Gregory stared. "Don't start kidding. I'm in no mood for that."

Murdock laughed. "No, you're one of those crooks that never use their brains in an original line. That's the difference between you and me. You'd never dream of planning a job to grab off two hundred millions in bullion that was about to be shipped to China, would you? But I've dreamed it and I'm going to put it through.

"Harry, there's nothing in the world for you but what's already in the top of your own head. One tap on that head with a hammer, and there's no world or anything else for you. Look at Napoleon. He won every battle he ever fought with his brains long before the fight began. Ah! There was a man for you. How'd I liked to have had him as a partner in business!"

"He fell!" said Gregory sententiously.

"Yes. He had everything and didn't know enough to quit and enjoy it," retorted Murdock. "That's the difference between Napoleon and me. Now see how simple all of this is."

Gregory looked at the umbrellas and canes and then at his partner. He shook his head. Murdock guffawed and slapped him on the back.

"On a certain day there will be shipment of gold bullion amounting to two hundred millions of dollars to China. The consortium loan, bankers call it. A tremendously big loan and the money is going into coinage. Look here!"

He raised a trap door and Gregory peered down into the orifice.

"What do you see?" asked Murdock.

"A lot of small kegs. Look something like the babies they used to ship lager beer around in," said Gregory. "What's the big idea? Canes, kegs, umbrellas—and hot air?"

"You ought to see an osteopath and get him to twist off that dumb-bell you wear for a head and twist on one he'd borrowed from somebody with real brains," snapped Murdock. "Don't you know that gold bullion is always shipped in kegs? But none was ever shipped in those kegs. They're made to order, right in this factory, downstairs. They're lettered and stenciled and they'll be dead ringers for the kegs that the sub-treasury in New York uses to ship bullion in. They'll weigh the same to a hair, when they leave here.

"This gold is going to be shipped by a steamship. It will clear the port of New York with these identical kegs in her strong room, and drop anchor in Canton, China. I'll make the switch of the kegs, and the men who have the gold in charge between the sub-treasury and the steamship wharf won't know the difference.

"Out under a shed over there"—he pointed out of a window to another building—"I've got some army trucks I bought after the war. I didn't know what I'd use 'em for. Thought I might go bootlegging, but the game got cut up too many ways. Now the same trucks will be used to whisk these kegs of bullion from the sub-treasury to this steamship. That's where the switch comes in—during transit."

"Show me!" grated Gregory. "Why, there'll be guards with guns all over and around those trucks like mites in an old cheese."

"Correct!" jubilated Murdock. "So if the old gun-

play stuff was to come off it would be suicide. Besides, if we got the trunks and left the phony ones, that would be an awful blow-back, and that gold wouldn't get out of New York in fifty years. The cops, the secret service men from the United States treasury, the private detectives and all good citizens—especially the citizens—would comb every inch of Manhattan Island. That's where the Napoleonic brain comes in, Harry—winning the scrap before it starts. Here's how. Watch me."

He walked to the first cane rack and selected the nearest walking stick. He walked out of the room and over to the rear factory door. This he unlocked and walked into the yard, where he came into range of one of Detective Hartley's eager eyes, which was glued, very promptly, to a knot hole in the high fence, whose top bristled with barbed wire.

Although out of earshot of each man, he could still see them, note Murdock's gestures, Gregory's corresponding changes of attitude, and try to patch together the known and the unknown. Hartley had to reason!

"Remember, there will be two sets of trucks and the kegs each contain. They are virtual duplicates, down to the smallest detail—even the cushions and the scratches on the paint. I've got a man working out those details who's got a microscopic eye and a micrometer brain. I'm paying him fifty thousand dollars—ten ahead of the job and forty afterward."

Gregory nodded. "I'm skeptical," said he, "but willing to be shown."

"Right," grinned Murdock. "Now, as I was saying, remember those two sets of trucks. I have my own set between the sub-treasury and the steamship dock. They're en route and stopped at a certain point the minute the real stuff starts from the sub-treasury.

"Now," he went on, warming up, "get this: the guards on the real bullion trucks are, of course, very alert. But they're only guards. They don't know how many trucks or how many kegs of bullion are going. The bankers who are making this big loan to China know that, for they have the bullion withdrawn from the subtreasury. And I've got a reliable inside man in the heart of the biggest bank who'll post me on those details."

"I'm listening," said Gregory, his avaricious eyes glowing. "What else?"

"Down come the real trucks with the real kegs of bullion from the treasury," blandly continued Murdock. "The van of these trucks runs into the rear of my trucks. I've got my own men on those trucks from out of town. And a lot more apparently innocent citizens, each with a cane or an umbrella, dodging in and out, or lined up along the street. These are not gunmen. Just crooks, or ex-crooks with bad records—men that are hungry—broke. They're already being recruited and trained. As I said, each one of them carries either a harmless looking cane or umbrella. When the real trucks with the genuine bullion kegs come abreast of this mob, every man of them with his cane or umbrella lets fly!"

"Hold on, Jim. What do you mean by 'lets fly?' "

Murdock chortled. "Over there"—he pointed across the rear of the factory yard with his arm— "is a kennel with one dog left in it. Go over and let him out. Keep behind the kennel. Watch what happens to that dog and then you'll know what 'lets fly' means."

Gregory complied. The released canine emitted a yelp of joy and started for Murdock on the run. Murdock raised the cane. The dog stopped stock still,

faltered, and then sagged down in a pitiful heap. He stiffened and lay quite still. Gregory saw the effect plainly. The cause remained invisible.

So did Detective Hartley, with his eye at the knot hole in the fence, but he did not know what it signified. He had not seen any flash or heard any report. So this cane in Murdock's hand, Hartley reasoned, wasn't the sort of weapon that was once in vogue—a pistol concealed in a cane.

The dog lay quite still. The two men paid no more attention to the animal. They returned to the factory, reëntering it by the rear door.

Hartley, descrying an auto approaching from the road beyond the front of the edifice and at a high rate of speed, promptly hid himself a little deeper in a thicket of sumac shrubs until this machine should pass. It did not pass, but moved up to the factory door and stopped. Hartley wormed along the fence until he could see it had a New York license number, and when its driver and sole occupant emerged he knew him at once.

"Mike the Maggot. What's he doing over here?" muttered Hartley, as he wrote down the machine's number. "Gee, I wish I could hear what those three birds are saying!"

He couldn't. He could only watch and wait. Hence Hartley didn't see the dog finally rise and stagger back to its kennel on unsteady legs, trying vainly to think out, dog fashion, what had happened.

Inside the building Murdock was talking to Gregory as he replaced the cane. "Now do you see it?"

"You bump 'em off with some sort of gas?"

"Bump nothing!" snorted Murdock. "Why, to kill those guards would be slow suicide for every one. If

I'm going to bump myself off, I'll take a quick route. The guards and the man who checks up the kegs of bullion, both, at the treasury and at the steamship, and who get a receipt for it, are merely out of commission for a few minutes.

"When they come back, they don't even know they've been out of commission. By that time they're on *my* trucks, they keep on and deliver the kegs. They get their receipt from the steamship purser, go back to the sub-treasury, and deliver that receipt. The gold isn't missed until those kegs are opened *in China,* you big simp! Long before that I've landed it in South America from the hold of the *Clothos!* Now can you see it?"

Gregory put out his hand. "By gad, you are a Napoleon," he said. "Say, lend me one of those canes. I want to put that dog, Patrol, out of commission, and then slit his throat."

"Nix!" said Murdock. "This cane is empty. The rest of them are all loaded, and so are all the umbrellas, all but the final ingredients. Ned explained to me that if I put it into them, the stuff would undergo a chemical deterioration and become harmless. They'll be loaded the night before the shipment is scheduled to be made —not before."

"Nitrate is dead. He was dying when this paper came out." Gregory tapped the sheet in his pocket.

"Too bad. Not my fault. I was in Washington. But I've got the name of that last ingredient up here." He tapped his forehead. "I didn't take a chance. I never do.

"I know all the ingredients. I mixed 'em myself for that cane.

"When the time comes I'll load those canes and umbrellas myself with the final chemical. The rest of it's

a cinch. I'll be at the *Clothos,* and we'll roll the kegs down into the yacht's hold. Our clearance papers will be ready. We drop anchor, go down the harbor—ab-so-lutely unsuspected—for we wouldn't have a China-man's chance to clear the harbor if that gold wasn't supposed to be in the strong room of the steamer that will take *my* kegs to China!"

"I don't like that dog," growled Gregory.

"Here. Take my gun and take the permit. Shoot the dog yourself when you go down to the country with me. I'll keep Audrey and the cop with me in the house. The silencer doesn't let the gun make a noise. Warren never heard me shoot Gusset, did he?"

"Thanks." Gregory pocketed the gun and the permit. They went into the outer office.

Mike the Maggot was waiting, and his face was far from angelic.

CHAPTER XLVI

A BEARER OF BAD NEWS

MURDOCK and Gregory each sensed fresh tidings of distress if not of disaster when Mike came into the office. Alchemists of crime have their own law of gravitation to combat. Gravity-plus was smeared over the new arrival's usual jaunty smirk.

"Mr Murdock—" he began.

"I am he," said the portlier man, with frigid urbanity as he glanced sidewise at the girl in the office of the chemical concern.

Mike eased off his high-tension.

"I am Mr. LeMar of New York, sir," said he, with an obsequious air. "I telephoned to several of your offices and one of them said that I could reach you by telephone, perhaps, at this place. As I desired to have a word or two with you in person I preferred to drive over rather than telephone."

"This is my partner in the silk business, Mr. Gregory," said Murdock pompously. His two lieutenants exchanged perfunctory greetings as total strangers do on their first introduction.

The girl in the office stirred restlessly, put aside her apron, closed her desk, and looked at the clock. Murdock smiled at her.

"If the front door closes with a spring lock," said he, "we won't detain you. As soon as I chat with this gentleman, I'm leaving."

"Thank you," smiled the girl "Mr. Marks promised me I could go home an hour earlier to-day, and if I miss the next car I'll have to wait another half hour."

As she left he turned to Mike.

"Be more careful before strangers," said he. "I'm not supposed to know you at all. You nearly left a loophole open, when you broke in that way. What's on your mind?"

"A lot," said Mike sententiously. "We've got to do some quick thinking and quicker acting. Did you know that this headquarters dick, Roger Warren, arrested your daughter in the foyer of my club last night, under the name of Velvet Mary, sent her to the precinct station house in the hurry-up wagon and then had her taken down town and put over the jumps after being in the Tombs, on a charge of murder?"

Murdock's bland, spacious mask fell.

He tottered back against the desk for the shock was

far more severe than the pistol's roar when he thought Gusset had killed him in his own library.

Then he gradually pulled himself together.

"No, I did not know that. Where were you?"

"I wasn't there, Mr. Murdock, when this pinch came off. I was over making sure that Brownie Joe and Ned and the other boys were all in the clear for the Winthrop job, for Harry, here, had phoned me that the dame would be at my club to meet him. The boys at the apartment house was all in the clear when I left them, Nitrate Ned had gone up the fire escape and into the room where her ice was, two inside men with gats was covering him from the hall, and Brownie Joe was in the ground floor hall-door, piping off the street. There wasn't a harness bull within two blocks nor a a flatty [1] in sight."

"Didn't anybody say anything when you got back?" Murdock's silky inquiry was no less sinister than his face was malignant.

"When I got back to the club, of course, I wanted to be sure the Winthrop dame was really there with Harry. I went to their table and had a drink with them. Afterward, the headwaiter called me aside and said there'd been in a pinch in the lobby. I asked him who was grabbed and he said it was some old-timer by the name of Velvet Mary. Otherwise, believe, I'd a' been down to that station house with Solly Chatterton and a Supreme Court writ within an hour."

Murdock was mollified. He was well aware that Mike would have taken big personal risks rather than be compelled to bring him this sort of news.

"The morning papers," Mike hurried on, "all said it was Velvet Mary was grabbed, and one of them printed her mug and record. How was I going to know that

[1] Meaning a dectective in plain clothes.

it was your girl when they give her the name of one of the Old Mill mob? You couldn't have guessed that yourself, Mr. Murdock. I only got the office on this about an hour and a half ago, and I've been trying to locate you ever since."

"Who told you?" asked Murdock.

"Ha! Ha! Benny Smart, the men's check-room boy at the club." He swiftly sketched Benny's story and added: "There was something about Benny that didn't smell right to me. Benny said he met this Warren after Warren made this murder grab, Benny told me that Warren didn't know your girl from the real Velvet Mary—who is Benny's wife—and that Warren didn't know the real Velvet Mary at all. Of course, that's all rot, because Warren must have seen your daughter the night of her party, when he got Gusset when Gusset was trying to get you."

Murdock nodded. "What else? Where's Audrey now?"

"I don't know. I thought maybe you could find out. That's why I lammed over here."

"Wait a minute, Mike," said Murdock, picking up the telephone. He called his country home. The other two could hear the girl's voice faintly as she presently replied.

"Is that you, Audrey?" asked Murdock anxiously.

"Yes, papa. My, how good it seems to hear your voice again. You've been away an age!"

"Say, my dear, what happened last night at the Versailles Supper Club? Were you arrested by Detective Roger Warren, under some other name, and taken into custody on a charge of murder?"

"He asked me to say nothing to you about it until he could see you. His superior officer said that he could explain it to you, but not to me," she replied.

"Where is Warren, now?"

"He's here, daddy, fast asleep. He was out all night on other police business. Was injured, too. I have just been talking to his mother on the telephone so she wouldn't be worried, because he's got to get some sleep before he goes to the city again to-night. He has to be there between ten and twelve o'clock on duty."

"You are sure you're all right? Were you abused or mistreated in any way?" asked her father, his voice crackling with anger.

"Well, no. Roger wasn't there and until he got back and released me, some of the other officials were rather severe in their questions. But it was all a mistake, papa. Roger will explain everything to you when he sees you."

"What did they question you about?" Sweat corroded his agonized brow. His breathing came in quick puffs. Murdock would have smiled at all the cops in New York if being grilled himself, but the thought of Audrey in such a situation almost shut off his breath.

"It was mostly about your pistol, daddy, the one you keep at your office. I'd better tell you about that when you get home. You remember, don't you—it was in the desk drawer when I went to get the dog-collar for Patrol?"

"Yes." He set his teeth. Why were the cops after that pistol? Well, they were days too late if they thought they could hang anything on him about that. Gregory and the real Velvet Mary could both swear he always kept it in that drawer, he could swear to it himself, if need be. Most fortunately of all, he had told Roger Warren, the night of Gusset's death, that his pistol was in his office and that was a thing that Warren would have to swear to if Solly Chatterton ever had occasion to cross-examine this dirty, despicable scoundrel who had dealt him such a foul blow.

"Where are you now daddy?" asked Audrey.

"I'm over in New Jersey with a gentleman on some business. In conference now. May be a little late getting home. Explain to Mr. Warren that when I got back from Washington I had to hurry out of town again, will you, when he wakes up, if I'm not home by then?"

"Oh, yes, daddy. I'll explain to him."

"Tell him I also phoned police headquarters this forenoon and enquired for him and that the Commissioner of Police told me that Mr. Warren and you had just left there and were going down to the country. The Commissioner also told me that Mr. Warren had a personal message for me. Tell him I'll be glad to see him and get it. If I'm not back before he leaves and he wants to leave me a note, I'll be glad to get that, too. So they let you go, eh?"

"I'm paroled in Roger's custody. When he leaves to-night, Patrol takes me in charge," she laughed.

"Harry's coming down to the house to wait for me," said Murdock, "and he'll look after you, too, if the dog can't. I may have to go to Newark, so if I'm a little late, don't worry, will you?"

"No, daddy, but come as soon as you can. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, my dear."

He hung up and turned toward the other two men.

"I've got a lot more, Mr. Murdock," said Mike the Maggot. "Better get it all off me chest while I got a good chanst."

"What else, Mike?"

"This dick, Warren, did know your daughter. Now did he know you was out of town?"

"He did."

"Then he's crossing you. I think this murder grab of his was phony. I don't know anything about it, but

why would he wait until he got into the club lobby to pull it off, when Benny told me the dick was just going into the supper room with your daughter? He was in soup-and-fish rags, and then he begun to grand stand. Who's murdered anybody? I never knew you to, and I don't believe your girl ever did. So that proves it was phony. Now, wait a minit—I'm just getting started."

"Take your time, Mike. Let's have it all," said Murdock placidly.

"This next stuff give me an awful bang. I've found out that Benny Smart's turned snitch. Remember, I said I smelt something in his story?"

"Yes."

"Well, it was Benny Smart that tipped off this same dick, Warren, to the Winthrop job. That must be the way that Warren come to bust in on Nitrate. He was in evening clothes, and I figger that's the way he got by Brownie Joe, for Brownie had seen this same dick come out—he told me Warren and your daughter and Mrs. Winthrop had all left together for my club—see?"

Murdock nodded. Gregory's face lighted.

"What did I tell you, Jim?" he cried.

"Let's hear Mike through, Harry. Go on, Mike. How did this hat-check boy ever come to get wise to the Winthrop job? You must have left the bars down, Mike, somewhere, and it isn't the way you generally handle our confidential business, is it? I left the details all to you, you know!"

Mike cursed luridly, furiously.

"Why, the Hell-to-Hackenny little rat," he exploded. "He dug a hole in the plaster from the men's hat and coat check room where he had charge, and that room joins onto the private dining room where Harry and I laid out the job to take this Winthrop woman for her ice. Now, who would 'a' ever thought that of Benny

Smart? And after me holdin' him up, all these years, too, and after Gregory 'nd you taking care of his wife, wit' a good job in your silk office.

"I happened to go into that check room to look for a muffler some mug lost last night, and I took down a coat of Benny's and found that hole. There was just a shell of wall paper between the check room and the dinin' room, and he had a pin hole through the paper, too!"

Mike paused, for "a rat" to a vulture is a far more noxious thing than a serpent to a song bird. Murdock licked his dry lips, mutely nodding, and Gregory cut into the conference.

"Mike's right. Benny squawked. Warren bounced in on Nitrate and the mob, after tossing Audrey into a cell, and after Benny had talked with Warren, as Mike says. I see it all now. That was how Mrs. Winthrop came to tell me that she'd met Audrey and Warren down at police headquarters—I told you that before, Jim. And I can also see, now, how Captain Raynor's dicks came to grab me and Brownie Joe at Solly Chatterton's house. This Warren was back of it all! He tipped off those other dicks."

Mike's face went blank with fresh mystery. "Why, I didn't know that you'd been grabbed, or Brownie Joe either!"

"They had to let Harry go," said Murdock, finding his first crumb of genuine comfort since chatting with his daughter. "I had them lashed to a post on that. Brownie Joe is still in. We've got to get hold of Solly Chatterton and have him spring Brownie. He's too good a man to lay in a cell."

"You said a forkful," agreed Mike. "But I got the office as I was leaving that Solly's been sloughed, too. He was with Nitrate when Nitrate was bumped off, I

hear. The bulls tossed Solly into a cell because they was sore when he bailed Nitrate, I guess. Of course he don't know who bumped off Nitrate, but it makes it bad, all around for Brownie Joe. Did they get Brownie with the Winthrop sparks?"

Gregory nodded gloomily, and then told how he had accompained the fatuous young widow back to the detective bureau to witness the double identification.

"Didn't I hear you say something about the commissioner of police sending you a message by Warren, when you talked on the telephone?" asked Mike of Murdock.

"Yes." Murdock related the incident, and how he had come to call that official.

"I think that's a plant of the commish," said Mike. "He don't, as a rule, talk to any civilian. His secretary does that, and unless the commish knows the civilian, you couldn't talk to him in a milyun years. Is your girl sprung?"

"She's on parole. Warren is at the house—down on Long Island. Audrey's in his custody."

"It is a plant," said Mike nodding. "I wouldn't be in too big a hurry to git back home if I was you. Stall a few hours, until we can get things straightened out again. Of course you gotta go back. So the dicks folleyed you to Washington, eh?"

"I left 'em tied to a post, as I told you. They ain't got a thing on me—not a thing," said Murdock arrogantly.

"I don't think they have, myself," said Mike judicially, "for if they'd found anything after they give your girl the third degree, they'd never turned her loose with that Warren on parole. She'd gone back inta the Tombs. So this murder charge was phony, and he was just grandstanding, as I thought. I don't know how he got hep to Benny Smart, but this Warren's sure a smart cop."

Gregory's former dread expanded into a gusty rage. The electric suddenness of Warren's appearance in the shadows of the apartment house stairs—from nowhere—had ruined his peace of mind so long as that police officer remained at large. His vindictive face grew more venomous.

"I'll bump him off if it's the last thing I do," said he viciously.

Mike laughed. "You're too late. Benny Smart's got it all laid out for to-night, when Warren comes to meet him at his hangout to fish for more stuff. Benny told Warren he dassent leave there for fear I'd croak him for snitching."

Mike paused, and his livid face wreathed in a faint grin. "I'd hate to disappoint Benny, now that I've got him spiked for a snitch," said he, as softly as if about to christen a babe in all its holy innocence.

That was enough for Gregory and Murdock. They understood that Mike the Maggot would see that Benny Smart followed his intended victim quickly enough, perhaps, to get a seat on the same trip that Charon would make to ferry Roger Warren over the Styx. Vultures have a plushlike touch to tentative murder plans. Actual words are rare. Inference is enough when killing looms large in their scheme of things.

"Suppose Warren don't go there at all?" queried Gregory, after a brief silence.

"I think he'll go," said Mike, "and we know he's working alone. He got a hundred per cent steer from Benny last night. Why would he think this next rap against our mob wouldn't be ready for him? To make sure, since you're going down to the country place to protect Mr. Murdock's girl, I'll send along a man or two with you. Then, if Warren don't go to meet Benny, the boys I send with you can give him the works, stick his

bones into the motor boat, and let him sleep with the soft-shelled crabs out in the sound, anyway."

The Maggot's visage was the hue of his nickname, for the worm was treading fast on the heels of vultures large and vultures small. This flock was losing male members with appalling swiftness. Leonard Grove was nailed, so was Brownie Joe; Harold Yates had blown the country; Nitrate Ned Marks and two fearless gatmen had slipped into shrouds; even Solly Chatterton, an always dependable ace for legal work, was sloughed.

Murdock made no reply until the three were outside by their waiting automobiles.

"If you'll take Mr. Gregory back to New York with you, Mr. LeMar," said he, "that will leave me foot-free to drive to Newark, where I have an important business engagement with some silk men."

This final remark was absolutely all the conversation that Detective Hartley heard from his sumac-bush shelter alongside the fence. He emerged when the two machines were out of sight, and hurried back to Manhattan to inform Acting Inspector Raynor how little he had learned, and why he had been unable to learn more about Nitrate Ned Marks.

Raynor nodded. "Go out and frisk that alley in front of which Nitrate was killed this morning," said he. "Maybe somebody lives along it that could give us a description of somebody else that was in it about that time. Plow through it from end to end and both sides. If anybody knows anything, bring 'em in for a talk with me. I've got to get the murderer!"

Detective Hartley went to work. Before nine o'clock that night he had located one witness, an elderly woman who took in washing, and who lived three floors up over one of the stores and in the rear. Her casual glance while hanging out laundry had noted a short man "with

a kind of old face" leaving the other end of the alley. She did not know of the murder until afternoon. "He put something in his pocket," she added.

The police department had not the slightest inkling that the vultures had decreed Warren's doom, or that Benny Smart was also to meet a rat's demise—in his own hole.

James Murdock's silence was his tacit assent to the death of both.

He drove to Newark and dined at a fashionable club, spending the evening with some men in the silk trade. He had his alibi as always. It was midnight when he ordered his limousine brought round and started for Manhattan, and his country home, some miles beyond.

Yet with all his cleverness there was one thing that James Murdock had not yet done. He had never yet broken an eel across his knee.

CHAPTER XLVII

REINCARNATION

VELVET MARY MALLORY watched Murdock and Gregory leave the office of the silk warehouse as if they were two wraiths from a world that had been yesterday, but to-day no longer was.

When Mike called she told him where Murdock had said he could be reached by telephone. She hung up. She had her work done and she sat down to re-read, at her leisure, the snappy, vivacious account of her own supposed arrest the night before in the foyer of Mike's joint. It was like incense to her nostrils from Pagan altars long cold and dead.

So was the photo-diagram depiciting the Velvet Mary of the days that had long been entombed. There was a series of pen-and-ink drawings around a large photograph of her, as she had once been; pretty and pert, her languid yet lustrous eyes, the sweet curve of her mobile mouth, her trig, lithe figure. Around the photograph were the sketches depicting her as knocking down an astonished "harness-bull," walking up the buttons of his blouse as he lay prone, with high-heeled shoes and skirts that revealed her ravishing ankles; her graceful surrender to another and younger police officer; the scene in night court where she had been sprung through the influence of the Old Mill mob.

There it was, all peering up into her fear-shadowed eyes like ghosts popping through the coffin-lids of all the dead years.

A renaissance of her dead self swept over her. Golden threads of antique dreams, hidden behind the great curtain that had been drawn across the good old days flowed out and deftly wove themselves into her imagination, transfiguring and glorifying the present.

How well she remembered those nights, in the Pagan crash of cymbal or throb of drum, the soft, sobbing chords of the violin welded to the full, rich undertones of the piano in the back room, where Mike the Maggot had danced and every goof or vulture of either sex who saw and heard also danced, vicariously, with that nimbled-legged scoundrel.

Velvet Mary looked at it all and muttered:

"My Gawd! And I onc't looked like that!" She shook her head and glanced almost timorously, at the clock. It still lacked two hours of her scheduled closing time.

Fierce revolt surged through her heart and brain. Life had once held for her the heady froth of an unre-

pentent prodigal. Then something very strange, very sweet, and very mysterious had touched her. It was for that that she had started to "livin' decent!"

Velvet Mary had fallen in love, but the man she loved was profoundly ignorant of it and always had been. Velvet Mary had turned her back on the old mob chiefly because of this man.

She caught a glimpse of herself in the pocket-mirror of her bag as she reached for a handkerchief. Deep-graven lines in face, haunting look of fear in eyes, desolated droop to lips—all these had been put there by Harry Gregory, plausible, sinuous, clever scoundrel, after she had lifted a leather from his pocket. That was before she fell in love. Gregory had found her, had threatened her after she started "livin' decent," in her new-born, divinely delectable dream trusting, some day, to meet and marry the man she loved!

As an alternative to a trip up the river Gregory had extorted from her a written confession and then gave her a job at fifteen dollars a week. Each week she had to pay back to him four dollars. He also charged interest on this "loan," and all these years Velvet Mary had been repaying him, lest she follow Bernard Satchel Gusset into Sing Sing for ten years.

The monthly letters which Benny Smart, her husband, had received from his half-brother were twelve yearly reminders of the dreadful power Gregory held over her. She knew he was a crook but a high-class one. She couldn't snitch, for that was not according to her code and Velvet Mary had a code in lieu of a conscience. Besides, who would credit the truth if she told it?

She had never forgotten the one man she loved although he and the world had forgotten her until this other girl had been grabbed and the quenchless flame of the real Velvet Mary had lighted some other forlorn fe-

male waif's footsteps toward a prison cell. Velvet Mary Mallory had never been taught that the little things of life decide human destinies; that the big things are merely decisive in the illusion that mankind had woven from its stuff of sense and of dreams!

She locked the office door and walked down to the superintendent.

"I'm going home," said Mrs. Mallory. In her purse she had swept up all the petty cash for the day's business, a little less than three hundred dollars.

The superintendent stared. "Mr. Gregory will be displeased. Are you sick?

"Yeah. Tell him I'm sick—of him. Tell him t' go to hell!"

It was Mrs. Mary Mallory that had stopped to speak with the superintendent. It was the reincarnation of Velvet Mary, serenely insouciant, drunk with the draught from the cup of memory that stepped out of the door, hailed a taxi at the corner, and "bought herself blind." A dress, a hat, a pair of shoes, stockings, corsets, gloves, lingerie—bought recklessly and prodigally rode home with the bundles in the same taxi, tipped the driver, and fell over the feet of the drowsy Benny Smart in her neat little dining room.

"I say, wot's up!" His bulging eyes held a gleam of gladness and a macabre magnification as if borrowed from ageless days.

"You little snow-sniffer!" [1] She slapped his face. "Twic't I've broke you of the snow habit, and now you're back at it again. Mind your own business. I've got a date with a swell goof, that's what's up. I'm off that job—fer life. If you don't like it, git out. You

[1] A "snow-sniffer" is a cocaine addict who sniffs the powdered poisonous drug.

never come 'round unless you're broke or lit up—or something."

Velvet Mary disappeared into her bedroom. Her astonished husband, now in the relaxation of the dose which had nerved him to kill Nitrate Ned, heard her bang open the bureau drawer where she had left Harry Gregory's gat. It still lay there. The crafty and semi-crazed old cab-driver, brooding over his own wrongs and those of his dead half-brother, had slyly secreted it again where he had found it while rummaging for a little hoard of his wife's to get more "coke."

She hummed a little tune gaily as she made up.

CHAPTER XLVIII

INTERLUDE

"WAKE up, Mr. Warren. It is nearly eight o'clock, sir, and Miss Murdock has a bit of dinner ready for you before you go back to New York."

The loose eyes of Cobden the butler looked down upon the almost boyishly innocent face of the sleeping detective. His pistol was under his pillow and he knew he could rely on the joint vigilance of Audrey and Patrol against some new surprise, while he was on the trail of Harry Gregory, the elusive scamp whom he still believed the man behind a series of crimes too closely related to be coincidental.

Cobden had shuffled in like a half-crushed but still excited old clown. He had read the morning papers with a keen zest and a keener disappointment. Nitrate Ned Marks was not reported captured, but Cobden felt

that the Winthrop job must have gone flooey from the flash which early editions carried; he was excited because in his rôle of the mythical "Bosanquet" of the firm of "Bosanquet, Barnum & Company," he had often seen that other old reprobate and was a secret admirer of "work," although Cobden was the deft "scratcher" and not the daring safe-cracker.

"All right, Cobden. Is there a shower handy?" Warren stretched luxuriously.

"I 'ave it ready, sir. I looked after it myself. There's razors 'andy, too, if you care for a bit of shave."

"Kind of you." Warren's keen eyes looked up into those of the elderly forger. He knew he was wanted in several places. Much as he disliked the duty, he must arrest Cobden after he had nailed Gregory.

"I 'ad the iron run over your clothes, sir," said Cobden, laying out the garments. "A man who is so busy as you are has little time to visit the tailor. I think you'll find everything in proper order."

Twenty minutes later Warren sat opposite Audrey, and Patrol hovered in the offing. He ate swiftly. She told him of her father's message and queries, also of his request that Warren leave a note.

"I'm very sorry that he didn't get back," he replied candidly, "for then I could have straightened out all of this mix-up very easily. In police business I have no option but to obey orders. Your father shall know, and there is no reason why he may not tell you—if he wishes—all the facts."

He rose from the table and glanced at his watch.

Audrey came round to him. "Is father in any kind of trouble?" she asked anxiously.

"None whatever that I'm aware of. Have you paper and envelope?"

She sat him down at her own desk and he wrote:

MY DEAR SIR:

I kept my word to you and protected your daughter. I had to take extreme measures to save her life. I directed that she be arrested—under another name, of course—to prevent her being killed by a concealed assassin in the foyer of the Versailles Supper Club, whither I had gone with her for a dance. My superior officer, the commissioner of police, has sanctioned her release, temporarily in my custody.

Unfortunately, you have not returned. I will, therefore, defer giving you the details until I may do so, in person. It may interest you to know that I am going to arrest the scoundrel who intended to kill your daughter —and who, I believe, will kill you, as well, if not apprehended. That is part of my duty in returning to New York to-night. I trust that you are in good health and remain,

Very sincerely,

ROGER WARREN.

He sealed the envelope with care and addressed it: "James Murdock, Esq." Then he handed it to Audrey.

"You mustn't peek," he laughed, "but if your father wants to let you read it after he does, he may. Tell him those are my instructions."

"I won't peek. Oh, Roger, I hate to see you go away! Must you go?"

"Patrol will take you in charge now," said he. "Come here, sir. Do you see this young lady? Well, she's Miss Audrey Murdock. I've got her under arrest. I'm going to turn her over to you, and you must sign for her. Understand?"

Patrol emitted a resounding bark.

Warren scribbled a few words on another slip of paper. He extended the pen. "Sign here!" said he.

Patrol leaped to the desk, reared, and touched the pen with his paw.

"No matter what happens," continued his master, "no matter who comes to this house, or what they say or do, you tell them to read this other note I leave here." He scribbled again and put the missive into the pigeonhole of Audrey's desk.

To Whom It May Concern:

Miss Audrey Murdock is prisoner of the police department of New York City. She is paroled in my custody and that of my pal, Patrol. All persons will be governed accordingly. Failure to observe this information will entail the same penalties as aiding a prisoner to escape custody from any other police officer.

Roger Warren.

"Refer all persons to that, Patrol," said Roger sternly. "If Mr. Murdock comes, show him the note. You will allow Miss Murdock freedom of the whole estate, but she may not leave it until my return—understand?"

"Wow! Bow! W-arr-agh!" assented Patrol.

Warren turned to the girl.

"And now, good-by!" said he, extending both his hands.

She took them with a tremulous smile.

"Aren't you going to—to kiss me?"

"It is not permitted for police officers to kiss their prisoners," said Warren, with a mixture of gravity and whimsy.

Patrol gave a whoop of rage and darted for the door, snarling, his hair bristling.

Harry Gregory opened the door, paused, and glowered down at the animal.

"Call off that brute!" said he venomously.

Then he saw Roger Warren.

"Come here, Patrol," sternly commanded his master. "You know your duty. See that you observe it. Good night, Miss Murdock."

He put on his hat, strode to the door while Patrol fawned at the girl's feet, whining, eagerly, turned, and looked once at Gregory, stepped out into the night and was gone.

A surly chauffeur whisked him to the train. Warren was in the Pennsylvania terminal five minutes to ten. He emerged, signaled a cab, and started for the rendezvous with Benny Smart, the laughing maniac.

"Send that brute outside," directed Gregory, when the machine carrying Patrol's master had left the grounds.

"No," said Audrey, "I can't do that, you know, for I'm technically in custody and Patrol has me in charge until Roger returns."

"Your father knew that when he sent me down to protect you," rejoined Gregory, with a dutiful smirk. "He's in Newark, and will be home as soon as he can. Your father was very much upset when he learned the cowardly trick that had been played on him by the man he trusted, during his absence. I want to talk to you, and I cannot with that monster looking at me as if he'd eat me up."

"We'll go into the next room a moment," said Audrey. "Patrol, I'll be back directly. You stay here."

He wagged his tail. She stroked his head and the intelligent animal did not rise, even when the folding doors were closed.

Gregory took a chair, and Audrey half reclined on a divan, slipping the note Warren had left for her father into her corsage. She was still uneasy at the ordeal of her arrest and what followed, and more uneasy at War-

ren's leaving. Gregory was secretly pleased with her ill-concealed distrait manner. Her wings had been clipped, and Warren's base treachery toward Murdock proportionately enhanced this schemer's covert plans.

He drew the pistol carelessly from his coat pocket and held it in his hand. He had concealed the three thugs sent down with him by Mike in the garage, and he had instructed them to shoot Patrol on sight. He wanted to get the dog out of the house so that one or the other of them could do that.

Audrey stared at the pistol with amazed incredulity not unmixed with fear. Gregory sneered.

"Did you ever see this before?" he demanded.

"Is it papa's pistol?" she countered.

"It certainly is."

"How can that be?" she cried. "The police showed me one exactly like that last night, too."

Gregory spat out an ill-repressed oath. He leaped from his chair. Audrey was alarmed. Outside the door Patrol's warning bay came with reassuring timbre.

"The pistol the police showed you last night," said Gregory, as he recovered his poise, "wasn't this one. Your father left this locked in his desk when he went to Washington. He found it there when he came back. The pistol that the police showed you was probably mine. The two were exactly alike. Mine was in my desk drawer. It wasn't there to-day. So I borrowed your father's. I think I know how the police got my own pistol."

Audrey was again perplexed. This was all beyond her. Gregory was silent while he thought that Mrs. Mallory had given his weapon to the police to even up old scores and perhaps have him arrested for having a weapon in his possession without a permit.

"Yours?" echoed Audrey at last.

"This cop, Warren," he went swiftly on, "was snooping around the office several days ago, prying into records and things that were none of his business."

"You are mistaken," said Audrey. "He was there by father's invitation."

"True," he retorted. "But your father didn't know then what an arch-sneak Warren was, for he was always posing as a chivalrous young chap, who had saved your father's life, wasn't he? Well, what do you think of this same young man since last night?"

Audrey was silent. She had no idea how either her father or Gregory knew of her arrest.

"The police," he went on, "questioned you about the pistol they *thought* was your father's. It was mine. Warren was trying to trump up a charge of murder against your father, who's almost heartbroken. You should have seen him to-day when he was told that you'd been haled out of the club, hurled into a patrol wagon, and locked up on a false charge of murder! This Warren has a dog. Well, 'birds of a feather,' you know the proverb.

"Warren's on all fours with that beast in the other room. He's very subtle. He even told your father, with every appearance of sincerity, that he believed him to be a thoroughly honest man!"

His winged barb missed the mark. Audrey's face was radiant.

"What else could Roger say?" she demanded. "My father is the best dear old daddy in the world."

"I'll say he is," said Gregory. "I understand you, Audrey. And I know you dislike me. Yet your father trusts me."

"Perhaps too much!" said she half belligerently.

"Perhaps not enough," said he silkily. "Warren's been lying. He has no explanation to offer to your

father for having you arrested on a charge of murder. I tell you, before this episode is ended, Warren will try to arrest your dear old daddy on the same fake charge."

"That is not so. I know it isn't so, and when daddy gets home I'll show him that it isn't so."

Gregory laughed.

"A woman's prejudice is better than a man's deliberate reason—until she finds her prejudice is baseless and his reasons are sound," he oracularly returned, pulling out his watch and looking at it. It was five minutes to ten.

He regarded her steadily. Warren was nearing his doom. Mike the Maggot would not miss even if Ha! Ha! Benny Smart, the rat, did.

"But Warren," resumed Gregory plausibly, "is building a house of cards on the shifting sands. Thanks to the mix-up in the pistols, the police haven't a shred of evidence on your father. They had my pistol—not his. I've got your father's pistol, they haven't got it and never had it. So I saved your father, even while they were trying to torture you!"

Audrey's face burned. Memory of Big Mag's lascivious leer, the horror of the Tombs, the vile odors and viler conversation, gave pith and point to his words. Gregory watched her like a serpent trying to charm a bird of paradise. He grew more conscious of his power.

Then his glib arguments were dashed into ruin.

"You are mistaken," said Audrey quietly. "It wasn't *your* pistol the police officials showed me at all."

"What?" His astonished face was clouded by doubt at her confident tone. "How do you know? You were never arrested before. You know nothing about police intrigues and frame-ups!"

"It was neither," said she. "I know the police were not lying to me. Inspector Montrose is not a liar, al-

though he is a severe man. He is a just man, too. He told me he would not lie to me."

"Oh! Ha! Ha! Ha! That's rich," guffawed Gregory.

"I know he did not lie to me," said Audrey, her temper rising at the jeer leveled at her intelligence. "I saw the photograph of the finger-prints on the inspector's desk when the matron took me out of the room at police headquarters. There were two sets—father's and mine."

"How do you know?"

"Father has broad ends to his fingers, and large thumbs. I've never seen his finger-prints in photographs before, but I'm sure those were his."

"You'd never seen your own, either, until last night, had you?"

"No, I never had. But I saw my own on the other photographs. To make sure, when I got home to-day I took a little lampblack from a candle and made some prints from my own fingers. You see, the police officials didn't take any finger-prints from my fingers after I was arrested. Those they had—and they were careful not to show them to me, either—had been taken from papa's pistol.

"They could not have procured both sets of finger-prints in any other way, could they? Certainly not from your pistol, for that was in another desk, and I had never handled *your* pistol; never, in fact, knew you had one. But I did handle papa's pistol, in the upper right hand drawer of his desk the morning I went to get the dog collar he had bought for me to put on Patrol. You are mistaken, Harry."

He looked dubiously at the weapon in his hand.

"From what you say, I probably am," said he. "But what does it all prove? Every word you say proves that what I have said about Warren is right. He's an

unmitigated cur. He ingratiated himself into your father's confidence, flattered him, promised to care for you while your father was out of town—and then tossed you into a prison cell, and his fellow fiends gave you their infamous third degree.

"What for? They didn't do it just to amuse themselves. They did it because they're hunting evidence on which Warren can arrest your father for murder!"

Audrey laughed. "A man's prejudices," she parodied, "are better than a woman's deliberate reasons—until he finds his prejudices are baseless and her reasons are sound.

"Put up your weapon, Harry," Audrey went on. "I've got to go back to the four-footed policeman who is guarding me."

"No," said Gregory, "I'm going back with you, but I won't put it up." He glanced at his watch. It registered thirty-five minutes past ten. "I'm going to shoot that dog!"

"Don't be premature," said Audrey with such a smile at him that his pulses tingled. "I'm fond of Patrol. Wait until you see what Roger left in the pigeonhole of my desk."

He walked out following her. Patrol cocked one baleful eye at the junior partner of the Murdock silk firm and the hairs on his neck and back rose and fell.

"He's reading your mind," laughed Audrey. "Here, read this!"

She handed him the note in the pigeon-hole addressed: "To Whom It May Concern."

Gregory returned it with an ironic bow.

"We must always respect the police department," said he, "and since Warren saved your father's life and procured your release on parole, I'll respect your wishes, if not those of that smooth young detective."

"Thank you, Harry. I think it is better that way. I'll wait up for papa. You needn't. By the way, did you enjoy your supper and dance with Mrs. Winthrop last night? I met her as I was leaving police headquarters to-day."

"So she told me, when I was leaving there," said Gregory.

He could have bitten his tongue off at this slip, for Audrey looked at him steadily, and asked: "Were you arrested, too?"

"Not by Warren. By some other blundering police officers. They had to apologize and release me, though."

"No," said Audrey, "I don't think Warren blunders much. He didn't the night he saved papa's life, did he?"

CHAPTER XLIX

VELVET MARY COMES CLEAN

VELVET MARY MALLORY bathed and dressed with the keen zest of one who has discarded penitential garb for the reality of purple and fine linen. The touch of the silken and satin finery purchased with funds filched from Murdock & Co., electrified her as a slender rod of fragile glass crackles and sparks under the friction of a piece of silk.

Peeping out from forgotten corners of her memory were the specters of the Old Mill mob, shades from that house of revelry by night. They would have been aliens to a bright day, but they were quite at home in the brooding shadows of the evening.

Humming a gay tune, Velvet Mary continued to ply

such artifices as were needful to enhance the remnant of her own former siren's lure. She donned a blond wig and gazed at the transformation, nodding to herself in the glass.

"Nifty! You'll do!" said she, as if addressing another than herself. "Now for a little belladonna, kid. That'll give your lamps a real kick—lamps that'll make him sing: 'Jest Because Y' Make Them Goo-goo Eyes!'"

She seized a silver shoe horn and donned the pumps she had bought.

"Some kicks!" She apostrophized them approvingly. "But the dirty robber that sold 'em charged me seventeen fifty. An' then they wonder why a goil can't go straight in dis burg. Well, 'stolen sweets is sweetest.' Ain't it the truth? Huh!

"I'll lay a little bet that there ain't no blow-back from Mr. Gregory about the coin I borryed from him and his partner this afternoon. If he says I took a dime, I'll yell he's a liar and give him the name of Inspector Montrose to prove I'm honest and truthful! He's me friend. He said so himself."

Every word she uttered seemed spoken by a phantom in her blood. It surged strong, resolute; her perceptive faculties seemed as keen and wary as ever.

Before she drew on the dainty gown she flexed her biceps.

"Soft!" said Velvet Mary scornfully. "You'se couldn't knock a whistle off a peanut roaster."

She turned to the furniture and seized a chair. The dumb things in the room seemed to look curiously at her, as if they, too, were only waiting some spark from the same nowhere that had magnetized and energized her, to promptly engender a like movement to her own.

She swung the chair above her head and around it.

It took her breath. Then she did a bit of "shadow boxing," and finally stopped, panting, after a swift left jab at the jaw of some imaginary antagonist, and a cruel right hook that would jolt him into the good, old summer time.

"Yes, he kin go t' hell!" said Velvet Mary, thinking of Gregory. "I guess I'm all set fer a swell chow. Where'll I go? I got at least four long hours to wait fer him. He won't show up until ten 'r leven. I know one place where I *won't* go. That's Mike's. The bulls have their glims glued to that dump. I'll hit up some Eyetalian dinner. Spaghetti 'nd chicken—that's good enough for Benny 'nd me t'night."

Benny was still sprawled in his Morris chair, dozing in his self-assumed rôle of a glowering avenger. He feigned sleep when Mary came out. She had locked her door and he couldn't get at the gat she had filched from Gregory's desk. Unbalanced, impenitent for his slaying of Nitrate Ned Marks whom Murdock and Gregory had sprung when they allowed his half-brother to go the route, Benny was sullen and suspicious.

"Where y' goin'?" he demanded.

"I'm goin' to dinner 'nd then I got a date," said Mary. "Come on, you little fool, and put some good grub into that sour stomach of yourn. What's the good of hatin' yerself to death? You can't make the world any diffrunt, can you?"

"I ain't as smart as you seem to be," he grumbled.

"You never was. What's the odds? I married you fer better or worser. I got the worser. But if you want a little slice of the better, come on. I've got dough 'nd I'm goin' to blow it. Wot else is it good for?"

Benny Smart could not rid himself of his depression. Dope is a deadly thing. One moment and the imagination rises to heights so lofty and so flame-capped as to

counterfeit heaven and an hour beyond its victim cannot retrieve himself from the ashes of his incredibly remote abode in caverns of ghouls. Benny was waiting to take his next shot just before Roger Warren would come and he was not displeased that Mary was going out, although he feigned the part of the wronged husband.

"Gregory'll snatch you bald-headed," he grumbled. "I dassent go outa yere until I see a certain party."

"Gregory kin go to hell—an' so kin youse," said Mary. "I dines solitary 'nd then I keeps my date. You better pass up these cheap dicks or you'll be lookin' fer yer head in an alley some day."

Mary flounced out. Her Parthian arrow was more barbed than Benny Smart dreamed. Benny never was a dreamer. He had never drawn the bolt bodily from a sordid existence and stepped out into an enchanted one, as had the girl who rode away in a taxi to the bright lights. She must have snared a john but who, why, when, or how he had no idea.

Mary showed wisdom in avoiding an eating place where stilted, decorous people masticate in half-frozen amiabilities. The princess collar she wore hid the scrawnier segments of her slim neck; her cosmetics elided the crow's feet; the silk veil tossed her well-penciled brows and lashes into a deep-set frame in which her once lustrous orbs sparkled.

Velvet Mary did not hurry. She did not strut. She sat down demurely, ordered languidly and ate liberally. The waiter brought her check, awed by the soft insolence of the countenance Velvet Mary cupped in her slim hands. He stood with a humbly erect attitude. Velvet Mary tossed him a dollar bill. He bowed gratefully.

Outside she signalled a taxicab and drove directly

home. En route she looked up at the tender, crescent moon.

She entered the house from the front door. Across the street, Detectives Dean and Daniels looked at each other. They had seen several other shadow figures furtively enter this place, a little while before, but the gloom of the ancient and almost forgotten street made indentification hopelessly inaccurate.

Velvet Mary's figure was much plainer. As the taxi turned its powerful headlights threw her into high relief.

"I wonder who that dame is?" muttered Dean. "I've got a hunch that the inspector thinks something is due to come off down here. What d'ye say, buddy, if we take a walk across—up the street—and then get a little closer to that doorway?"

"Good idea," assented Daniels. "Got yer jack handy?"

"Yes, and my gun, too," said Dean. "A jack is a handy thing if some roughneck tries to dig your eye out, but it ain't much use if he starts to blast out your spinal column."

Rhymed with the secret, chained thoughts of her approaching date Mary Mallory came into her tiny dining room. She had visitors. There were four men there. At sight of Mike the Maggot her heart almost stopped. It was like a harsh hand dragging her back to the grim, somber realities she had tossed behind her on leaving Murdock's office.

Her first wild thought was that Gregory might have returned, discovered her theft of the three hundred dollars, and then sent The Maggot in pursuit of it. Then her head came up regally. Low and base as he was,

The Maggot never had been and never would be either a copper or a moll-buzzer. Mike was what he was and so was she. They had been pals and intimates. That wasn't why Mike was here with four gorillas.

"This is an unexpected pleasure!" beamed Velvet Mary, extending the tips of her gloved fingers to The Maggot.

"You're all dolled up!" said Mike. "What's the big idea?"

"The big idea, Mike, is that I've got a date wit' a swell john. How d'youse think I grabbed off this outfit? Don't you know it pays to advertise? Didn't you see all the press-stuff I been gettin'?"

She did not know why she added the last words. It did not seem to be her own voice. Nor was the silvery peal of laughter at Mike's wondering and admiring eyes.

"When is he comin'?" he queried.

A flash of impending evil whirled her brain into a new channel, with the old hateful buoys of fear marking limits—not for herself, for someone else.

"You mean, when am I goin'?" she bantered. "In a minit, Mike. I forgot somethin'. What's the big idear?"

Her gaze roamed over the other three young men. She knew their mission. She knew their type Her gaze caught and held the now fearless face of Ha! Ha! Benny Smart, who was sitting ridgidly nearer the door that led into the back hall.

"You lousy little saw-horse!" said Velvet Mary. "You've been sniffin' again. Don't you lie to me. I know it by your lamps. Mike, I wish you'd take that little rat out and drown him. Three times I've broke him of bein' a snow-bird. Three times I've worked my fingers to the bone to keep the narcotic squad from grabbin' him. I sent to the cure three times and he came back cured. Now—look at him!"

She moved a step toward Benny Smart, and he promptly ducked under the table. The three gorillas laughed raucously.

Velvet Mary did not pursue her errant spouse. She had no intention of that. What she was after was a clean passageway to her own boudoir. She knew that unless she had some weapon perhaps Mike and his fellow-thugs might object to her leaving this place.

Her bedroom had no outside window save a little oblong apology that admitted a minimum of streaked sunshine and air freighted with smells never catalouged. She could not get out of that hole in the wall if she would; and she would not if she could—for in keeping her date Velvet Mary had no intention of so much as wrinkling one seam or strand of her raiment. She was keeping a strange tryst and she must be at her best.

She unlocked the door, went within, leaving the door partly open and turned on the electric light. She opened the bureau drawer. The gat with its silencer still reposed in the same place. She thrust it into her bag with one deft hand unseen, while with the other she picked up her atomizer and jetted the spray of its scent over her breast, humming blithely. Then she deliberately selected a nice handkerchief and came out, holding it over her open handbag, so that her slender fingers could whip out the weapon without suspicion. Clutching the bag close, she relocked the door.

"I hope," said Velvet Mary, "that none of youse gen'lemen will think I don't trust you. Fact is, I gotta keep my spare change locked up or this little snowbird'll hock everything to get his hop. I oughta beat him up, but I ain't got time. Gotta hurry."

"Yeah!" Mike's eyes clouded. "Sorry, Mary. We gotta little business to 'tend to, me 'nd my friends. Al-

most time for it to come off. Can't you stand him up for ten or fifteen minutes?"

"Well I like *that!*" she replied. "Who gave you any license to carry on your business in my dinin' room? Not that I got any kick if it'll oblige an old friend—but I do have a kick on breakin' the foist date I got in years 'nd years. Sorry, Mike."

He started to protest.

"Elevate!"

Velvet Mary's tone was as hard as any that his quartet had ever used and the murderous muzzle of the gun gave her command a most unrhetorical but no less coercive inflection. Even Benny stuck 'em up.

"Youse kin send Benny after de gat," said Mary. "Sorry, boys. But me heart's plumb busted—I'm ruined fer life! I wouldn't break dis date unless I had one wit' an undertaker foist. Besides, I don't want to be here when your business is done. This is me home. What's the big idear? Youse never usta hide behind skirts, Mike, that I knowed?"

Her idle hand turned the knob behind her to the back door. It led to the side stairway. The Maggot was too amazed to vouchsafe a reply.

"I'm goin' down with this gat pointed up!" said she. "After I'm in the clear, I'll dump it in the ash can. Benny kin get it outa the alley."

The door closed. The four lowered their hands. Benny kept his up until the tap of the French heels on Velvet Mary's pumps came too faintly to be heard.

Then he hurried to the door and cautiously peered out.

"Wait here," he whispered and then started down the deserted stairway. He could descry his wife's figure at the far end of the darkened passageway. Mike peered after him. He could not see Velvet Mary, but he could

see Benny. He did not intend that Benny Smart should "Ha! Ha!" any more at such an expensive rate of laughter as had followed the blow-back on the Winthrop jewel job.

Benny groped in the ash can for the gat and then, whipping a white hand behind in a furtive signal to Mike, crouched behind the big galvanized container.

Velvet Mary was just at the point where the alley joined the street along which Roger Warren was to come. A harness-bull was walking toward her as she turned sharply to the right. He was a young cop, fresh from the police school, alert, vigilant, and at sight of her he paused.

Velvet Mary curved into the light with no thought for any one but the man whose dim but sturdy form she now saw as he started up the same side of the street on which she was. She knew him by his shoulders, for he had the chest of a pearl diver, and he walked with a snappy precision that she could never forget. He had always walked like that.

"Wait a minit! Where are you going?" snapped the young harness-bull.

Velvet Mary stopped short.

"Speakin' to me?" she asked, flashing him a brilliant smile.

"Yes. What's your name? Where do you live? Where you going?"

"Why, I gotta date with my fella," said Mary, smiling ingenuously.

He scanned her closely. He did not see the girl as she had seen herself all day. He saw only the painted face, the wig, now slightly awry. The expensive clothing, the mock demure air savored of only one thing—a soiled dove. His orders were to keep the streets free from all predacious females.

Velvet Mary anticipated the announcement of her arrest by her swift, cobralike left jab to one of this fresh cop's lamps, and as her tiny gloved fist bored with a writhing twist into his astonished eye, she stepped in and brought up her right with a crashing jolt to the point of his jaw.

The second blow did not travel twelve inches. But her new-found spirit chastened by her years of livin' decent gave it a hysterical force.

The rookie cop felt as if he had been struck by the rim of the world. He went down. Instantly Velvet Mary was walking up the buttons of his blouse as daintily as a ballet dancer. She did not hurry. She saw, out of the tail of her eye, the coke-corrugated visage of her husband, projected like a fiend's face from the rim of hell above the garbage can.

"Always a smooth worker," she took her time, daintily pirouetting over the nose of the prostrate cop and prancing a step or two farther along toward Detective Sergeant Roger Warren. He was transfixed. He could not believe what his eyes told him he most certainly saw, the Velvet Mary of the long dead years stepping up to him and laughingly remarking, loud enough for Ha! Ha! Benny to hear:

"You're a good-looking young cop, ain't yuh? Well, kid, take me down to night court!"

Then, beneath her frantic whisper:

"Fer Gawd's sake don't go up the alley. Benny's there—you're framed! The Maggot's in my house wit' three gorillas! Look out! O-oh, quick!"

She threw herself sidewise and caught him around the neck with both arms. For this moment had Velvet Mary lived and toiled.

The viperous hiss of Benny Smart's first and only

effort to bump off the man he hated was echoed by the roaring report of the pistol from the prostrate police officer who took a snap shot from his prone position without waiting to rise as the old cab driver's murder-bent visage caught and held his startled eyes.

The weapon, with its attached silencer, flew sidewise, and Benny ducked the second shot behind the galvanized refuse can.

Roger Warren felt the thud of the bullet from Benny's pistol as it struck Velvet Mary's body. He could not get at his own weapon for her protective clasp was shifted, one hand lowering to clutch his arm.

"Don't be too hard on Benny. He's only a poor, crazy cokey. He never got over Satchel's bit—you know Satchel's his half-brother. Oh, I'm—so—happy—"

Her voice caressed him even as her slender fingers drooped. He bent his head to catch her last, fragile words.

"I—I always loved yuh," sighed Velvet Mary, a wraith of her old smile curving her carmined lips. "I quit—the mob—fer you, kid. I been livin' decent—"

She died quietly in his arms.

Roger Warren did not hear the shot that Mike the Maggot took at Ha! Ha! Benny, whose maniacal laughter rippled out from the place of his shelter. The shot missed its target. It ricochetted on the pavement and its hop struck the still prostrate officer in the arm. He rose, his right hand limp.

"Take her!" Warren passed the dead girl to the officer's good arm, then he leaped into the alley, whipped Benny Smart from the hiding place with his left hand, and with his other, fired point-blank at Mike the Maggot still peering from the back door.

CHAPTER L

WHO WAS KILLED?

THERE never was any question of who killed Mike the Maggot. He pitched down the back stairs as dramatically as if he had been rehearsing this final act for a long time—as, indeed, he had been.

Warren paused only long enough to handcuff Benny Smart to Mike's corpse and get the dead man's gun.

By this time Warren had reached top of the stairs and was battering at the door which had been frantically locked by the other three gorillas, Detectives Dean and Daniels had expeditiously jacked that trio into merciful unconsciousness when they fled out the front entrance, and they were all ironed before the patrolmen on adjoining posts had come on the run in response to signals.

"Send the wagon around the corner," directed Roger Warren, "and clear that street of all but the wounded officer and the dead girl. Hurry!"

Followed by Detectives Dean and Daniels, he dragged the now terrified Ha! Ha! Benny and the dead Mike into the patrol wagon. He directed the arriving ambulance to take the wounded officer to the nearest hospital.

"I'm all right," said the rookie cop sturdily. "Only a scratch! Get the rest of that gang!"

Warren ran back into the alley and flashed his torch. He picked up the automatic with the silencer. By the time he had returned a sergeant of police in a side-car had sped up with another patrolman.

Warren took him aside. He flashed his shield and

pointed to the corpse stretched in the wagon. Then to Velvet Mary, whose stark form was held erect within it by another officer.

"Take 'em over to the house," snapped the sergeant.

"No! To headquarters," said Warren. "I'm working under personal supervision of the commissioner of police." He flashed an order and the sergeant in uniform nodded as his quick eye noted the signature.

"All right!" said he. "I suppose we'll get the details?"

"Two of Inspector Montrose's men are here from the third inspection district, also by orders of the commissioner," said Warren. "Better have your men frisk that house from top to bottom, and if you get anybody else, bring them over to Center street."

He swung aboard. The clang of the gong sent the crowd scattering faster than the night sticks of insistent patrolmen.

Then occurred the inevitable and crowning touch of fantasy to the ironic night.

"Who was killed?" breathlessly asked an eager reporter who had legged it frantically for three heart-breaking blocks at sound of the gun fire. He wanted to win his spurs and he hurriedly donned them then and there.

A civilian answered his question. "I heard one of the plain-clothes detectives mention the name of Warren," said the man. "Better ask a cop. They'll know."

"Officer, I represent—" The eager young reporter flashed his police card. It, too, bore the signature of the commissioner of police. "Who is Warren?"

"Detective Sergeant Roger Warren, working out of headquarters," said the patrolman, unaware of the purpose of the query. "Move on, there—you!" He brandished his stick and darted away.

"Holy cat-as-trophes!" The young scribe dived for a

near-by cigar store and almost knocked over the telephone booth in his eagerness to get into it. He had a "beat!" He called his office, imparting the news in an excited voice to an incredulous night city editor.

"Send Toby Snails over to headquarters! This is Jimmy Johnson. Yes, I'm sure. Didn't I see him stretched out, dead as a door nail in the wagon? The wagon's gone to headquarters. Not to the station house. Yes. Get the confirmation if you don't believe me."

"Where's Deputy Commissioner Roxey?" asked Warren when the wagon with its gruesome burden of two dead and four living prisoners had discharged its cargo.

"He's getting some sleep," said the subordinate in the detective bureau.

"Do you know where the commissioner is to be found?"

"Yes. He's on his way here now, before he goes home. Been at a dinner delivering an address. Here's the commissioner now!"

Roger Warren came to attention and saluted.

"Hello, Roger. When do you sleep?" his chief asked. "Come into my office and tell me the news." The door closed. "Have you nailed Gregory?"

"Not yet. I'm going after him as soon as we clean up this mess. I left him down at Mr. Murdock's country place."

He swiftly detailed what had happened and the commissioner pressed a button.

"Notify Inspector Montrose and Acting Inspector Raynor that their presence is desired at headquarters," said he. "Tell Raynor to bring down Solomon Chatterton and that woman witness who saw the little man in the alley when Nitrate Ned Marks was shot this morning. Tell Inspector Montrose that Detectives Lieutenant Dean and Daniels are here with some prisoners

from that place he put under surveillance to-night." He turned to Warren. "Do you think we can clean all this up? It's pretty near time we did, you know."

"I think we can, if you'll give me the benefit of your judgment," said Warren. "I've got Benny Smart. If that woman identifies him as being in the alley, that explains why Solly Chatterton didn't hear the shot that killed Nitrate Ned Marks. Benny used this. He used it again to try to kill me—but Velvet Mary——"

He stopped. The commissioner of police nodded.

"Line them all up," said the commissioner. "Then let this old lady who was hanging out her washing see if she can pick out the man who was in that alley."

They were a sullen, dogged lot.

Brownie Joe Goodman had the place of honor on the left. Next to him was Leonard Grove. Solly Chatterton was next. Benny Smart, his crafty face contorted in a mirthless grin, stood between the lawyer and the first of the three gorillas, whose heads testified to the accuracy and speed of Dean and Daniels with the police detective's handy weapon for subduing an armed bandit.

The elderly woman looked them over as if they were so many pies, and she had been asked to pick out the one containing mince meat. Warren walked with her.

"That's him!" Her finger extended itself to the cab driver.

"You are sure?" Warren asked.

"I cannot be mistaken. But he had on an overcoat and a hat. I seen him drop something in his pocket. I couldn't see what it was."

"Take him upstairs. I want a little chat with you, Benny. You made me a promise last night, you know!"

"Ha! Ha! I almost got you. If me wife hadn't been stuck on you——"

"Shut up!" Warren's tone was so savage that Benny collapsed like a decrepit accordion.

"That lets me out, doesn't it, Mr. Commissioner?" wailed Attorney Chatterton, as Warren and his chief started to leave the room. "Why am I held for murder of a client? It's an outrage."

"Quite so, counsellor. Most unfortunate. So was the wanton shooting of two patrolmen in Acting Inspector Raynor's district when the Winthrop robbery occurred. An astonishing coincidence, Counsellor Chatterton, makes me take a little time to decide what shall be done with you."

"Coincidence?" he blustered.

"Brownie Joe happened to be in your house with all the jewels just before Nitrate Ned Marks was killed. This coincidence, counsellor, may carry no suspicion of felony against an honored member of the local bar. But it occurs to me that the Bar Association of the City of New York may wish full facts from me. I may ask you for them later. Sorry. This is my busy night."

"Last night, Benny," said Roger Warren, when the commissioner, Montrose, Raynor, and himself were seated with the cab driver, and a stenographer was noting query and reply, "you tried to kill Audrey Murdock in Mike the Maggot's dump. You copped my gun. I was too quick for you. I sent her in for murder. I grabbed you and then went to your house. You gave me a one hundred per cent straight tip on the Winthrop job.

"This morning you killed Nitrate Ned Marks after he was bailed. To-night you killed your own wife while trying to kill me. What's the idea? You never were a gunman or a thief. You're just a cab driver."

Benny Smart turned a placid face to the quartet.

"Murdock," said he. "Big Jim Murdock was the guy I wanted to get. Me brudder tried to get him. You killed me brudder——"

"One moment," said the commissioner. "Warren didn't kill him, although he thought he did. But why did your half-brother want to kill Murdock?"

"It's most thirteen years ago since the bank job," said Benny Smart as casually as if discussing an ancient blizzard. "I was driving my hanson. Playing the down town mob until after Wall Street shut up, and then I'd pike up town fer the evenin' hotel jobs and theaters. One day Bernard Gusset, my half-brother, come to me and said: 'I gotta chanct to get some dough, and from some good people. I got Harold Yates to help me. I'm going to grab a bag. I'll pass it to Yates. Yates'll toss it inta your hansom. You'll be lighting a cigar and won't see it. Then you'll drive around the corner and pick up a big high-hat man. He'll signal you. You'll drive him wherever he says.'

"I stood for that. The bag was grabbed by Bernard Gusset. Yates passed it to the cab. I drove around the corner. Big Jim Murdock, he hailed me. I drove him up to the Old Mill on Forty-Second Street between Seventh and Eight Avenue. He went in with that bag. He meets Mike the Maggot. Mike takes care of him. I get a hundred beans fer dat job. My brudder, he got a good slice, and so did Yates. Both of them was grabbed. Then Murdock crossed me brother."

"There's one of my links, Mr. Commissioner," said Inspector Montrose. "That was the motive for Gusset's going into the house."

"That was why you tried to kill Audrey Murdock last night and me to-night?" asked Warren.

"Yes. I ought bumped you off last night 'nd I wouldn't been here to-night," said Benny. "Ha! Ha!

I'll betcha Mike the Maggot's got a big surprise. What d'ye know about him? Why, the rat, he was plannin' to bump *me* off! And you got him. Ha! Ha!"

"Send him over to Bellevue for observation," said the commissioner. "Tough luck, Inspector. I doubt if we can make a case on that chap's uncorroborated testimony."

"Well, there's the girl," said Montrose. "Warren arrested her."

"I want to have a little talk with Chatterton," said the commissioner. "I think he's about ripe. Bring him up."

Attorney Chatterton was almost overripe. He exuded soap at every pore, and he alternated this with profuse perspiration.

"I'm not going to waste any time with you," said the commissioner. "If you want to get from under the landslide, just make a legal statement to the stenographer that you're volunteering some facts within your own personal knowledge, of your own free will and accord. Then sign it. We'll all witness it.

"Then you can come across with what you know or you can go downstairs again. You'll get all we can give you—and I think we've got enough to put a crimp in your shyster stand-in with thugs, murderers, and bandits for a little while."

Mr. Chatterton proved a fluent dictator. He was a facile penman as well. Then he proceeded to come as clean as any dirty linen ever known.

"As soon as this is transcribed, counsellor," said the commissioner, "and you have made oath to it, we'll arrange for your release on bail—provided you also sign a stipulation with the police department to keep your hands off in any legal proceedings with the rest of this gang. Until then, you'll be the guest of the police

department, but no one shall know that your stay isn't voluntary."

The telephone rang. The commissioner took down the hook.

"The commissioner of police is speaking. What's that? No statement of any kind to the press, sir, on police business until it is completed. Sorry to appear disobliging. Yes. My duty is to the citizens, not to the press, until later. Later you shall have full particulars."

Toby Snails, arch-demon of headquarters police news, turned to the night city editor.

"The commissioner of police refuses to affirm or deny the death of Roger Warren. I guess Jimmy Johnstone was right."

The night city editor bolted for the composing room, a flaring tail of scare-heads trailing him like Halley's comet. The sensational Extra boiled out of the press room and into Park Row shortly after midnight, and about twenty minutes before James Murdock's magnificent limousine rolled out on the Cortland Street ferryboat on the Jersey City side of North River

"Wuxtry!" yodelled a newsboy with lungs rivaling a tug boat's hoarse blasts. "All about the moider of a headquarters cop! Perlice 'nd bandits in big fight. Three killed!"

Murdock bought a newspaper. Warren's name, like that of "Abou Ben Adhem," led all the rest. Murdock's fingers shook a little as he paid the boy. But his face was inscrutably calm as he read of the demise of the man whom even his chauffeur thought had saved his employer's life.

The chauffeur wondered all the way to the country

estate why Murdock's phlegm was that of a stoic. The driver of the limousine was a decent sort for Audrey sometimes used her father's city car for her friends and Murdock didn't want any prison-tainted unregenerate lurking near the apple of his eye.

He left the paper in the limousine and greeted Audrey with his usual spontaneous affection.

"My poor little girl!" said he. His voice broke. "What in the world happened and how could a fine chap like Roger Warren let it happen?"

"Here's his message," said Audrey through her happy tears.

He fingered it tentatively and put it in his pocket.

"Oh, daddy, do read it! I'm on fire to know what made such a change in him. One moment he was—well, as lovely as he has always been. The next, he was so brutal, so positively unlike all he had appeared before."

"He was, eh!" growled her father. His momentary compunctions at Warran's fate were dissipated. The unpardonable offense in Murdock's eyes was that Warren had dared to violate the sanctity of his daughter's innocence, defile the artificial Eden within which he had always hedged her since she was left motherless.

"Please, daddy!" she begged, kissing him again. "Don't keep me in suspense. I've been so distraught. But Roger told me to-night, before he went to New York, that you were in no danger that he knew of."

"What?" He could hardly credit his ears.

"He's never told me so, but I know he thinks a lot of you," she went on feverishly.

Her flush of love, her pathetic touch on his sleeve, her fleeting eyes were too much for him. He opened the note, unfolded it, and read it by the desk."

"My God!" His groan startled her. The paper slipped from his nerveless fingers. It fell to the floor.

Audrey stooped to retrieve it as Murdock tottered to his liquor cabinet, flung open the door, and hastily poured himself a glass of brandy from the decanter.

Audrey re-read the missive. Her eyes danced with delight. She ran to her father triumphantly.

" 'Nothing is too wonderful to be true,' daddy. Roger said so himself. He sent me that message by the matron to cheer me up. I just knew there was something unusual, mysterious about the way he behaved. And even Harry admitted to-night that the police had no cause for suspicions. Don't you see? It was all a mistake. Roger knew I hadn't done anything.

"But after he had me arrested, he had to go somewhere else on duty—just as he did to-night! He's brave, daddy. He saved your life, you know. Wasn't it fine and noble of him? And he'll come back to-morrow and tell you all the details, just as he says. Won't that be grand!"

She kissed him again.

"Why, how cold you are, papa! Are you ill?"

"Y-y-yes, Audrey. I'm almost knocked out over what happened to you. I'm—I'm not so young as I once was."

If ever in his devious career James Murdock had faltered when seeking an alibi, it was now. Every word of his daughter's was like a poisoned poniard through his heart. He had condemned to death the gallant, upright, devoted police officer whose faithfulness had alone preserved life for all that life made worth while for him.

He sank into a chair. He breathed hard. How desperately and how futilely he wished that he might live this awful day over again. He would have tossed away every penny of his ill-gotten gains without a qualm, if he might thereby breathe back into the nostrils of Roger Warren the breath of life for which he had deprived him by his tacit acquiescence in the plans of Benny Smart and Mike the Maggot.

He dared not tell Audrey that Roger Warren was dead. He could only sit in a dumb stupor and pour himself drink after drink, hoping that the alcohol would render him sufficiently sodden to forget that he was now branded with a mark worse than Cain ever carried.

Outside the house Patrol whined eagerly.

"I'm still on parole until Roger gets back, as I told you," said Audrey. "Look, papa. That dear dog tried to sign his name to the piece of paper Roger left, transferring his own authority to Patrol!"

"You—read—it!" Murdock's tongue was thick, but his brain was still demoniacally clear. For him the gates of hell had opened and as Patrol's face spotted itself against the window, Murdock saw not one dog's head, but three. Cerberus guards the gate of hell and Murdock knew at last what that dread entrance signified.

He poured himself another drink.

Audrey finished reading and carried the almost empty decanter to its place in the cabinet.

"Aren't you going to bed, daddy?"

"Yesh. Bime by," said her father.

CHAPTER LI

"GOLDFISH AND SEQUENCES"

"TAKE Brownie Joe Goodman into the morgue and let him have a look at Mike the Maggot and Velvet Mary," directed the Commissioner of Police, "and then bring the gentleman upstairs for a few moments. We all want to be introduced to him."

Brownie Joe was less arrogant than when arrested. Sight of Solomon Chatterton in a row of murder suspects

with himself, and the grewsome fresh corpses had not bred much additional confidence in this taciturn gentleman.

"Mr. Stenographer, read over to Mr. Goodman the sworn deposition of Attorney Chatterton from your notes. Joe, go over and sit down by the stenographer to make sure he isn't faking you," said the Commissioner. "It reads like a best-seller—and I think somebody's been sold. Maybe you can help figure out who is going to pay for all this mess, now that Nitrate Ned Marks and the two gat-men that he had with him are where no checks are cashed unless they're written on asbestos; while Mike the Maggot is doing a dance over the brimstone pavement and Solly Chatterton's spilled all the beans."

The Commissioner paused and the stenographer began. Brownie Joe gave a fine imitation of a brahma rooster on a perch that had suddenly turned red-hot beneath his claws, as the police scribe reeled off page after page monotonously.

"What do I get outa this?" growled Joe, when the deposition had been finished.

"Well, Joe," smiled the head of the department, "I'll give you a free look at that same document, after it's been typed and sworn to and your lawyer has signed it. After that, I don't see how you can very well get any more than life—plus perhaps two or three bits of from twenty to forty years each. There's a limit to all things, you know, even in the police business. We seem to be nearing the limit.

"How long have you known this Harry Gregory and what was your cut to be out of the North River silk job you helped frame up with Leonard Grove and Harold Yates?"

It was just a shot in the dark. Police targets are not always in plain view and the North River silk job had no

apparent visible bull's-eye. Nevertheless, Brownie Joe growled:

"I ain't got no cut from that job, Mr. Commissioner. Gregory stalled me. He said the dough wasn't in yet."

"I will cheerfully and unreservedly certify to the truth of Mr. Gregory's statement, since he isn't here to certify to it himself," replied the Commissioner. "More than that, I'll just relieve your anxiety permanently, Joe by saying that Harry Gregory will never get a dime from the Molando Silk Company to whom he sold the stuff, since it was their own stuff. Never mind why. And more than that, Mr. Gregory's going to walk right back into the next cell to yours, the one we sprung him from, for a few hours of temporary liberty.

"He's hooked for the Winthrop job already. Benny Smart gave Roger Warren, here, the tip last night. You know that for you saw Warren come back to Mrs. Winthrop's apartment, but he was in evening clothes. That's why you didn't give Nitrate Ned Marks the high-sign. Be more careful, Joe, on the next job. Can you blame Warren for framing you up and grabbing you, with that cake of soap full of all those nice sparks, in Sol Chatterton's house?"

"I'm through," said Brownie Joe.

"I'll certify to that, too, Joe," said the Commissioner. "Now, what do you know about Jim Murdock? How long have Mike the Maggot and Murdock been working together?"

Then and there Brownie Joe Goodman began to live up to his incongruous surname. He leaped back into the tomb of dead years and exhumed the Bernard Gusset job, with Harold Yates, confirming all that Benny Smart had previously said. He waxed so eloquent that the police stenographer had several sorts of writer's cramp before his glib tongue had finished his story.

Joe went back to his retreat to meditate. He is still meditating as a receiver of stolen goods and will for ten years more.

Inspector Montrose turned to the Commissioner.

"I'll send for the big goldfish, I guess," said he, "only I don't know just what aquarium he happens to be in."

"Who is that?" asked Acting Inspector Raynor.

"James Murdock. He's the king-pin of all this mob," said Montrose.

"He was in Hoboken this afternoon," said Raynor, "and he said he was going to Newark." He told what Detective Hartley had learned and how Murdock was also hooked up by eye-witness evidence of being in the Maggot's company a few hours before the attempted murder of Warren.

"Isn't Gregory down at Murdock's country place?" the Commissioner asked Warren.

"He was when I left, sir."

"You're such a glutton for work that you wouldn't mind going down after him, would you?"

"I'll go immediately, Mr. Commissioner."

"Shall I send Dean and Daniels with him?" asked Montrose.

"No. Warren can arrest Murdock, too, if he's there or comes in. He probably will go there by to-morrow."

"If he doesn't pull another Houdini on us," growled Montrose, "like he did on Dean and Daniels in Washington. The newspapers will have some sort of a flash on this last blow-back and he may duck and give us a lot of extradition trouble."

"You might send Dean and Daniels to Newark and have the police department there coöperate with them in a general alarm for Murdock," said the Commissioner. "If Warren gets him at his country home, he can nail two

goldfish at once, now this last little acquarium of their's has been broken."

"Shall I charge Murdock with the North River silk job as well as Gregory?" asked Warren. "The fact is, I have nothing much on him, aside from what's been shown here to-night."

"No. Charge him with the murder of Bernard Gusset," said the Commissioner. You didn't kill Gusset. You only thought you did. Inspector Montrose proved that to me the next morning and before you admitted killing him in court."

Warren was surprised, but so much was happening in these crowded hours that he had little space for amazement and less time to indulge it.

"Suppose," went on the head of the police department, "I sit by my desk and watch the flashing scales of a goldfish in its glass bowl. I see one fish through the side of the bowl, another through the top of the water. My finger reports one fish, my eye two. Feature to feature, shining scale to shining scale, motion to motion, the two fish are exactly alike.

"Does my eye report reality if there be one fish, or my finger if there be two? If one, which one is the real one and which the illusion? Even a camera would show two fish, yet a pair of scales would show but one. Do you understand me, Warren?" [1]

"It is quite plain, now, sir. Until now, I was simply following my hunch on Gregory, as you instructed me to do."

"You have done well. If you hadn't arrested Miss Murdock last night and uncovered Benny Smart, got his tip, and landed the Winthrop jewels, none of this new

[1] AUTHOR'S NOTE—With acknowledgments to Professor James Byrnie Shaw, of the University of Illinois, whose original illustration of "reality" and "unreality" is here given in his precise words.

evidence would have been available," said the Commissioner.

There was a rap at the door. A detective from the Bureau of Criminal Identification came in.

"I thought, Mr. Commissioner, that you'd be interested in knowing the department now has in custody three escaped murderers. One is a train-robber and killer from Wyoming, Peter Forsythe; another is Pietro Mancushino, and the third is Bad Jim Lynch. The two last broke jail in Michigan while waiting trial on indictments for murder and robbery of a bank there. They fit the descriptions and two of them have corresponding finger-prints."

"Who brought them in?"

"Detective Sergeant Warren, sir. They were in the same batch with Mike the Maggot, alias Michael LeMar."

"Notify the proper authorities and ask that officers be sent here for identification. Send them over to the Tombs. Anything else?"

"Yes, sir. Leonard Grove wants to make a statement. He says Yates was with him in the North River silk job and so was Goodman."

The Commissioner sent the hard-worked police stenographer to take Grove's confession from the door of his cell. It would be a tonic for the other thugs and bandits, lest they forget their repentant mood and change their minds later on. Such things sometimes happen in actual police business and punishment of guilty men higher up is rendered correspondingly more difficult. The Commissioner remembered that James Murdock was rated a millionaire and that he would probably move heaven and earth to release these pawns of his to evade a conviction for killing Bernard Satchel Gusset.

Yates was arrested by wireless on a ship at Panama Canal and returned.

Warren left headquarters and took a taxicab to the

railway station nearest Murdock's country place, after procuring fresh ammunition for his pistol and a few cartridges in reserve.

He struck off across lots for the place where the unsuspecting Gregory was sleeping and then made his way through the venerable trees, wondering what form the dénouement would take with Audrey's father—and with her.

He looked up at the twinkling stars. The agony of the infinite was his for Audrey's sake. Time seemed to hold no golden moment. The cold, unfeeling procession of these eternal mileposts of the universe had watched countless mortals rise and fall, nations wax and wane, the shining dust of worlds rended apart and crumbled beyond possibility of reintegration.

" 'Nothing is too wonderful to be true,' " he mumbled, not with faith, but with despair. He almost wished that Benny Smart's bullet had struck him instead of the poor, forlorn Velvet Mary, who last earthly thought was one of happiness and whose cold features now wore her final smile as if in triumph of the spirit over the flesh.

He saw a brilliant light from the window of a lower room. Some one was awake. He reconnoitred cautiously. His toe struck something. He looked down. Patrol's body lay stretched out, his legs sprawling, the hair of his head covered with a black deposit which perplexed his master no less than the shock to find his faithful pal had been murdered during his absence.

Warren peered cautiously through the window. He discerned the figure of James Murdock standing before a sliding panel in the oak and trim of the wall. The window was partly open, but Warren could see no sign of a weapon.

Suddenly Patrol licked his hand with an affection like that of the last clasp of Velvet Mary in front of the

darkened alley leading to the rear of Benny's Smart's hangout. It was almost too much.

Then the intelligent animal sat upright, his eyes gleaming with suppressed canine laughter, as if to say:

"Well, I fooled 'em, didn't I? They shot at me and I just played dead. Where do we go from here?"

CHAPTER LII

GHOSTS

HARRY GREGORY heard James Murdock return and he poked his head from the bedroom that was always kept in readiness for him as his partner's machine rolled crisply up the graveled driveway and passed under the *porte cochère* to the house.

He heard Audrey's little cry of welcome float up from below, the murmur of voices and Murdock's astonished "What?" when his daughter told the older man that Roger Warren held him in high personal esteem.

The rest of it was gibberish. Gregory had good reasons for not wishing to intrude on his partner until after Audrey had retired, in merciful ignorance of her father's terrible thoughts. Audrey knew that her parent had been drinking freely, but he had an occasional habit of doing that and was one of those rugged men who take their liquor in large amounts but quite infrequent occasions. Murdock would, if in the mood, split a bottle of good rye or Bourbon whiskey with a friend and take three-fourths of it for himself at a prolonged sitting.

To-night he had no friends and the liquor lighted new fires within his teeming brain. He had a strong personality, but no character, save his idolatrous affection for his only child. Such men live in the fortresses of

their own thoughts and they are helpless when they wish to transfer their distorted ideas to a situation where the all but extinct spark of conscience suddenly blazes up.

Gregory came down with his smug face wreathed in a dutiful expression as he entered the room.

At sight of him Murdock smiled. It was the tired smile that an imaginative personage has, a smile of disillusionment from knowing too much, a smile of growing helplessness and waning power.

Gregory's self-esteem which led him to magnify the most trivial service, real or pretended, made him a very poor companion at such a dire hour as his partner was experiencing for the cheap cynicism that veneered the younger man's incapacity to meet the world on its own terms was no secret to James Murdock.

"I came right down," said Gregory, "and have been looking after Audrey. That dirty sneak Warren was here when I left and he gave me a nasty look as he left. I wonder what he looks like now? How's tricks?"

"You'll find the newspaper in the limousine," said Murdock thickly. "It's all in it. Go and get it."

Gregory hurried out to the garage. The chauffeur had the paper and Gregory retrieved it like an obedient spaniel. He walked on clouds back to the house and within it sat down and devoured the flash which the inexperienced scribe had touched off by his too-quick effort to beat everybody to the wallop with the news.

Gregory laid down the sheet and looked at Murdock, whom the ghosts of this most exquisite contradiction of the truth were haunting worse than ever.

"They can't beat you," said he with sincere admiration. "You left this smart scamp tied to a headstone—instead of a post, didn't you?"

"Go over and read the letter on my desk," said Murdock.

Gregory read the note Warren had left for Audrey's father. He tossed it aside with a contemptuous gesture.

"All rot!" said he. "I told Audrey, without knowing what was in this, that Warren was trying to frame you for murder. I told her that he'd be back before to-morrow night to arrest you, too. But he won't, will he?"

"You white-livered pup!" exploded Murdock. "You gloat over his corpse? Why you're a dirtier rat than any gunman I ever hired. He was brave. He was honest. He told me he believed I was honest. I didn't have to tell him I knew he was. He proved it. And I left him for The Maggot to bump off. You—"

He choked. Gregory twisted in his chair. His face went white. His self-love was his heel of Achilles and Murdock had dealt him a mortal wound, one that he would survive, perhaps, but the affront he would never forgive. His eye fell upon the open liquor cabinet, then on the smeared glass at the older man's elbow.

"You must be terribly drunk to talk to me like that," said Gregory smoothly, "after all these years."

"If I only could get drunk!" moaned Murdock. "I can't. I'm dead, cold sober. His face haunts me. You sure had your nerve to tell my daughter that he'd come back to arrest me for murder. Whose murder?"

"I was thinking of Gusset. But I only said that to Audrey because I knew Warren wouldn't be back to help cure her of the infatuation she's had for him. She's been that way ever since she first saw him, but I guess she'll be cured to-morrow."

Murdock did not at once reply. He rose, walked steadily to the liquor cabinet, yanked out a fresh bottle of brandy, whipped out the cork and poured himself a brimming glass. He drank it neat. Then he refilled the glass and sat down with it at his elbow, his fingers sliding up and down its sleek sides as if mutely caressing it.

"Infatuated?" he echoed. "No. She loved him. And I guess he loved her. You don't know the difference. You never will. He was on the level. I'm a rotten crook. But you're so rotten that you make me seem straight. You'll never know the difference between things. All your brains could go in a dog's eye. There was a three-headed dog looking at me through the window, a while back. I wonder if Warren's ghost will come down here to arrest me? I wouldn't be a bit surprised if he did."

"I'll fix that ghost of a three-headed dog right now," said Gregory.

He must vent his murderous spleen on something or he felt he would kill Murdock in his own chair. That would never do. Audrey was now without Warren's protection and Patrol must be bumped off.

He rose and walked to the door. The dog was not in sight. That is to say, Gregory did not see him, but Patrol, on guard, saw Gregory the instant the door opened and the same instant he sat straight up, behind a large tree, waiting for Gregory to pass him.

Gregory pulled out Murdock's pistol, peered this way and that, looking for Audrey's four-footed guardian. Patrol saw the weapon. He knew what a pistol was for. The silencer was a new device, but Patrol didn't particularly care about that. He waited until Gregory was well beyond, then he bounded to another tree, straightened up, as before, so that the trunk concealed him, and repeated this operation until the infuriated man had reached the fringe of the lawn.

Then a twig cracked sharply under Patrol's great weight. Gregory whirled as if someone had fired at him. Patrol divined his peril. He leaped for Gregory and Gregory poked the silencer's muzzle between his eyes and pulled the trigger of the automatic.

The plumbago bullets so thoughtfully inserted by Inspector Montrose at police headquarters burst in a cloud of black soot and nitro powder, blinding the animal.

With a faint moan, Patrol sprawled and fell like the consummate actor that he was. He could not see, but he kicked and then lay as rigid as if really dead.

Gregory smiled evilly. He thrust the pistol into his pocket and strutted back to the house. Thus imagination wove a new and rather comic mask for Destiny, which promptly put it on.

"I'll see you in the morning, sir," said Gregory. "I've shot that dog. He's dead. You'd better get a little sleep. We've got a big job on hand, you know."

"Yes, I know," said Murdock dully. Gregory left.

He had left behind the only opiate that had power to soothe Murdock's thoughts. The Napoleonic coup had intrigued his imagination for many years. Bit by bit, piece by piece, he had woven the plan from fact and fancy. Warren was dead. So was Nitrate Ned Marks. The formula for the ingredients in the hollow canes and umbrellas that reposed over in the chemical factory in Hoboken needed another ingredient.

Murdock smiled. He knew what it was and he would set about buying it through his dummy chemical company. It was a very powerful lethal drug, and its effect when added to the stuff already in the hollow canes was to drop an invisible hood over and around the head of a man at whom it was projected. He could see nothing, and if he opened his mouth to cry out an alarm, the insidious poison would stifle him as surely as if a garroter's fingers were clutching his windpipe.

The beauty of it all was that the combination perfected in Nitrate Ned's own fertile brain had highly volatile properties. It would all evaporate, without a trace, leaving no scent. The suspension of the faculty of memory

could not be recalled. Nitrate was an expert chemist, he had ransacked many tomes of honest research in that subtle art, and his experiments between occasional fruitful jobs had been numerous.

"They'll all be tied to a post," grinned Murdock, as he replaced his poignant remorse with fond anticipation of events yet to be born. "I'll send my check for a hundred thousand dollars to the Commissioner of Police for Roger Warren's mother.

"That'll be a beaut of an alibi!"

He drank again, in anticipation of his most magnificent success of all. Murdock was a hop-head in that his narcotic was self-incubated in his fecund but perverted mind. His brain was cooler now. Yes, it was all Fate, hard and cruel, but that was the way of the world. Fate had bludgeoned him to his knees—in business. He had been tricked and he had become a super trickster.

He had beaten the men who had defrauded him until they were bled white financially and were pallid with rage. They knew he had duped them. They were furious. But they did not know that his come back had been staged with about forty thousand dollars that he had received in cold cash from the satchel of a bank messenger.

Only Gusset knew that. Gusset was dead. Yates had been cared for and was en route to the Argentine. Mike that Maggot had been taken care of and now Mike would never squawk. He was safe. The cops couldn't put a finger on him and he had stuck the harpoon of a marvelous ridicule into the writhing body of Detective Dean, called him a civil engineer by profession and a police detective by inclination to his face, then telephoned to the head of the department and been allowed to talk with him.

"Boobs!" whispered Murdock to himself. "They're

all boobs. I guess I'll go to bed." He paused. "What was that last chemical? I knew it a moment ago."

He cudgeled his blank brain in vain.

"Funny. I'm pretty tired. Guess I'll go to bed—no, I want to know its name. I've got it all written down, Nitrate Ned's dead, but he wrote it down. It's right here. I'll look at it, put it back, and then go to bed."

He arose and opened the sliding panel. Much liquor had lulled his brain so that he did not exercise his customary caution by drawing the curtains closely, extinguishing the lights, and then, only, open the secret panel in the wall in the darkness as he always had done before.

It swung back with magical celerity. His fingers explored the cavity. He drew out the envelope. He poised it in his hand.

Then and there the measure of his dreams was paralleled by the inescapable facts that had culminated in police headquarters, Centre Street, Manhattan. While millions slept the ghosts of former crimes of Murdock had crept gibbering from their forgotten sepulchres.

He felt a draft of cool air as if from a crypt. Roger Warren had pushed open the French window and was pausing in its frame to keep the shield of the police department of New York from a solitary smutch on its supreme symbol of the law.

Murdock looked. He saw a two-headed dog instead of a three-headed one. Gregory had killed the three-headed dog with Murdock's own pistol. This two-headed dog had one head like the dead dog's and the other was the white, stern face of Detective Sargeant Roger Warren, whom Mike the Maggot or Ha! Ha! Benny Smart had killed.

"Ghosts!" muttered James Murdock.

His reeling brain could stand no more. It whirled,

physically as well as mentally. His head described a small circle, then a larger one. The whole world was reeling. Murdock's ears heard a far off, spectral voice.

"The Commissioner of Police requests that you come to headquarters in New York, Mr. Murdock. Where is Harry Gregory?"

His ears did not hear the last question, but his eyes caught the glint of the steel handcuffs that this ghost was dragging from his pocket.

The circle of James Murdock's thought expanded to one that was infinite. Then it was zero. Time and space faded forever as James Murdock fell crashing to the floor.

Partol leaped inside and tiptoed softly toward the dead man. Then he stopped. His hair bristled. His ears stood erect. He whirled and pointed for the open window. He did not bark. He did not growl.

Patrol was a police dog and as much of a real cop within his limitations as his master. From afar came the faint, frantic scream of a girl!

"Patrol!" It was Audrey Murdock's voice.

CHAPTER LIII

GREGORY'S MOVES AND "MOVIES"

HARRY GREGORY did not go to bed after leaving his half-sodden partner in the living room. He could not sleep and nurse his latest grievance. Murdock had grossly insulted him, putting him on a lower level than the dead but still detested cop Roger Warren.

"That's rubbing it in," frowned Gregory, thinking of

the abortive Winthrop jewel robbery and Warren's previous calls at the silk company's office, his examination and temporary removal of the papers.

A crook is capable of believing anything but the truth. Gregory now believed that Warren was a two-faced liar in that visit and Warren's statement to Murdock afterward that he believed Audrey's father was an honest man likewise loomed as subtle strategem.

Now that Warren had been killed, the police department would certainly investigate further. Gregory had clammy recollections of the headquarters cell; he had a half-creditable (although wholly mistaken) repugnance when he thought of Warren's wanton arrest of Audrey and what had followed regarding her.

Now that Warren was dead, investigation would reveal where his dog had been and Gregory had shot Patrol in a fit of pique. That circumstance, while it might be explained as an impulse due to bodily fear on his own part, would still be embarrassing; and Gregory was not particularly keen for another interview with Deputy Commissioner Roxey or any other cop, since he had noted Roxey's cryptic manner when the Winthrop jewels were being identified.

On the whole, while Gregory was fairly certain in his shallow mind that the police department had nothing like tangible evidence to connect either him or Murdock with these latest efforts at business, it seemed to him a most appropriate thing to leave the country estate for a while, perfect Murdock's details of the grand coup elsewhere, and then strike for South American coasts, as Murdock had planned, leaving the cops to hold the bag.

Thinking thus, he walked out of the house and looked around. The moon had set and the night was velvet black, but the sky was clear and overhead the friendly stars peered benignly down. In the middle distance the riding

lights of the *Clothos* shone with even more friendliness.

"That's the idea," whispered Gregory to himself. "We'll just slip on board, up anchor, and cruise up the Sound. If Murdock wasn't so drunk, he'd call that a corking good alibi. When morning comes, he'll thank me for taking the driver's seat."

He hurried to the garage where he had concealed the three bravos whom Mike the Maggot had loaned him to croak Warren if the detective did not keep his rendezvous with Ha! Ha! Benny. Warren had kindly obviated the need for his murder down here by keeping the date. The result was known, Murdock had told him where the extra edition of the morning newspaper was in the car, and Gregory's plausible, sinuous mind immediately found in this printed record a ready factor for his schemes.

He procured the paper and stole back to Audrey Murdock's room, where he tapped repeatedly, until she was awake. She came to the door and he whispered:

"Can you be ready in fifteen minutes to go on the *Clothos?*"

Audrey was very sleepy. "Why?" she asked.

"Do you remember what I told you about Warren before your father came back?" he replied.

"Yes. Do you remember what I told you?" she retorted.

"Every word. But, Audrey, that's neither here nor there—now. Something else has happened; and because of what has happened to both you and me, since Gusset was killed, we must get out of here."

"Have you talked with father?"

"No, Audrey, I haven't. I'm sorry to say it, but your father has been drinking heavily. He's maudlin. But I've got to do what I can to protect him from the consequences of—this!"

He thrust the paper into her hand.

"Please read it, dress, and I'll take you to the motor boat, myself. Then we'll go to the *Clothos* with your father also on board. I'll be back in ten minutes. We have no time to lose. Your father, fortunately, has nothing to fear from any further police investigation; but most unfortunately what has happened in New York tonight is sure to be construed as inimical to him."

Audrey went to her electric light. The startling headlines thrust her, again, into an abyss of terror more horrible than on the previous evening, when Warren had raised the little statue of Hermes in the foyer of the supper club, hurled it through the glass door and ordered her arrest.

HEADQUARTERS DETECTIVE RUMORED KILLED

POLICE COMMISSIONER REFUSES ALL INFORMATION REGARDING REPORTED DEATH OF ROGER WARREN

Police and Murderous Bandits in Gun-Fight Near Southern Edge of Greenwich Village—One Thug and Unknown Woman Shot

The lines seemed to dissolve before her hot eyes and in lieu of them the inexorable face of Inspector Montrose and his associates glared up at her—and her dear daddy—with an implacable purpose which had been temporarily thwarted but would now be pursued more remorselessly than ever!

It was not of herself but of her father that she was now thinking, if the wild turmoil of her brain could be termed thought. For she knew that Gregory had not been lying about his possession of her father's pistol; she knew that there was something unexplained about its possession by

the police department during her interrogation and its return to her father's desk was also unexplained—for she knew Gregory had not lied (strange to say!) when she had proved to him that it could not have been his own pistol which the police had shown to her.

Who could explain these things, now that Roger Warren was dead? Audrey knew she could not and she feared that her father, although equally guiltless with her, as she was quite sure, could not explain them either.

The tragedy clutching her heart was not forgotten, could never be forgotten; but for the moment, parental love replaced the incredible anguish caused by news of Warren's death. It was another poniard sheathed in her breast by her doting father—in serene and blissfull unconsciousness of the fact!

Harry Gregory had not been off the grounds since her lover had left to do his duty and meet his untimely death. No one had since arrived but her father. So Audrey reasoned in the simplicity of the straight line that her father must have bought the paper in New York, read this same terrible announcement, and that was why he had not dared to speak to her about it, knowing that she had already suffered so much.

"I see it all," she moaned. "Father was doubly overwhelmed. He knew that Roger—dear, dear Roger!—had saved his life; and when he learned that Roger had also saved mine, he simply could not bear up under the shock. That's why he's drinking. He isn't afraid of anything. But—I'm afraid—for him. Roger alone knew the truth! He can never tell it now."

Harry Gregory was planning for the best—at least for the time being—and her father had already told Audrey that he intended to taking her on a short voyage.

At sea he could not be drawn away from her by business. The stinging tears came at last, almost blinding

her as she hurried into her clothing and hastily packed a small handbag.

The path to the pier was from the rear of the house. Her father was moving about in the living room which was in the front. She could hear his step. He was probably also making ready to leave.

When Gregory re-appeared, with his finger to his lips and a low whisper: "Don't wake Cobden," she nodded and he took her bag. They hurried down the rear stairway toward the motor boat.

She entered the cabin and collapsed on one of its seats.

"Be brave!" whispered Gregory. "To tell you the truth, Audrey, I'm scared to death."

He was. His shivers had returned and he had no need for dissimulation. He was growing more and more frightened. Looking at life from a perpetually oblique angle, lacking the Spartan callousness of Murdock, his contemplation filled the silent space around the estate with eyes which were not there, with whispers from lips that were equally fictive, save for the rustling dead leaves that still cling to the limbs of the venerable trees.

Facing delusion, Harry Gregory could not do aught but weave delusion, although of a warp and woof rather different from that which either James Murdock or himself had woven before.

"Just wait," he whispered to Audrey Murdock, "until I can get your father on board and then we'll go to the yacht. The man at the steering wheel can be trusted. He was sent down here to-night with your father's knowledge to aid me in protecting you. You remember, do you not, Audrey, that your father said he'd send me down?"

"Oh, yes!"

What did it all matter now, she thought.

"Your father," went on Gregory, "was not willing that

you should be humiliated again, before he could be on hand to voice a protest and take legal measures to protect you. He had to go to Newark but he first saw to it that three men should come with me. They've been on guard ever since I came. Of course, it was quite late when your father arrived and so these men were given sleeping quarters in the garage until to-morrow, when they go back to New York.

"Who are they?" Audrey's tone to his overstrained nerves was unnecessarily sharp, but it was grief that had whetted a new edge for her voice.

"Private detectives," said he silkily, grateful for his ability to lie fluently at such a time. It was a good omen. "Now, I'll go with the other two men to get your father. The motor boat won't leave until I return with him."

Gregory had every intention of keeping that statement to the letter. Yet as he walked part way up the pier, a new fear came over him. If James Murdock should see him in this present state of blue funk, while Murdock was still most unjustly irate over Warren's death—then Murdock would not only laugh him to scorn and kill their already slim chance for salvation by flight. He would also behave perhaps more eccentrically—not to say unjustly—toward his young partner than he had when they were alone.

This would be a double calamity. It would humiliate Gregory in Audrey's eyes; it would subject them to fresh chance of arrest. It seemed a miracle to Gregory that the New York police department had not already arrived and bagged them all.

In this conjecture, fear-bred though it was, Gregory was entirely correct. Even then, his Nemesis Warren was approaching the house to arrest Murdock and himself. Coming events have a weird way of projecting their mental shadows ahead of their arrival; and Greg-

ory's premonitions were again projected on the screen of his troubled mind with a peculiar vividness.

Since the pier was on the side opposite to the main entrance of the house where Murdock's light was burning and since Roger Warren was approaching from that direction, Gregory could not see Warren or Patrol. Nevertheless he paused.

"I'll stay here to keep watch," said he, "for Mr. Murdock sent me down to look after his daughter and would never forgive me if anything happened to her. You two boys tell him I'm taking her on the yacht. Don't tell him anything more, but say I want him to come and come quick. If he refuses, when you get back, don't say he refused. Instead, say he said: 'Go up the Sound a few miles and I'll wireless you where to meet me. It may be New London or it may be Fall River.' Understand?"

"Yes, boss," growled one of the gunmen.

"Repeat it," directed Gregory.

The fellow did. Gregory slipped each of them a bill. They walked a few steps and when out of earshot, one of them pulled a small torch from his pocket and examined the gratuity.

Each had a "century." They looked at each other. Even gat-men have their little feelings and among them the sentinel of suspicion of everyone and everything is always on guard. Moreover, Mike the Maggot had already handed each of the three worthies a similar hundred-dollar bill. To them it was quite enough for one blast to hand a dick the works.

"Whad'ye think of that crack he made about Murdock?" growled one.

"Aw, I guess dat's because he's got the broad wit' him. Mebbe dey're elopin'. She's some skirt! Wouldn't mind havin' her on me lap meself. Besides Mike said dis goof was O. K. He's Murdock's partner."

Slight as was their pause and colloquy, it sufficed to save Roger Warren's life the second time, for Gregory before learning of the detective's supposed killing had carefully described that young detective to all three bravos and Mike's imperative instructions had been to get him, first, and think about other things, afterwards.

It was in this pause that Audrey cried: "Patrol!"

Both gat-men, now walking around the rear of the house, in obedience to Gregory's instructions, stopped.

In that moment, when Patrol and Roger Warren had started from the front French window after witnessing the death of James Murdock, whose rusted heart-valves had refused to re-seat at the shock of seeing the detective whom he believed to be dead, the dog with nose down ran on the still hot trail of Murdock's young partner while his master ran the other way around the house in the direction of Audrey's cry.

The two gat-men at sound of his steps scurried for shelter of two trees, and hiding themselves behind their trunks as Warren came into view, his pistol flashing dimly but significantly. The hidden bravos waited to earn the fee they had each been doubly paid. Roger Warren had no inkling of their presence, as they stood stolidly near the point where he must pass, his eyes intent only on the figure of Harry Gregory silhouetted against the sheen of the water beyond.

When Roger Warren left the conference room in police headquarters where the Commissioner of Police and Inspectors Montrose and Raynor still were, Montrose looked keenly at the head of the department.

"What's on your mind?" asked the Commissioner.

"That kid's taking a long, long chance going back to get those two vultures all alone. Gusset might have killed him, if Warren's second shot hadn't broken Gusset's

arm; Grove and the other two scoundrels with Nitrate Ned almost got him last night, and only a special Providence protected him from death again to-night—so Dean and Daniels told me when they came in with Velvet Mary and the Maggot. But, by gad, Mr. Commissioner, I surely liked the way he went out of here with his head up!"

"Why, Inspector Montrose?"

"Because he's overboard for Murdock's daughter the same as she went overboard for him."

"Are you sure? I've never seen the girl," replied the Commissioner.

"No, you never have," said Montrose facetiously, "and, what's more, you haven't raised five daughters and watched four of them pick out sons-in-law for you, as I have. I know the signs of a young man in love. I ought to, for the fifth mad candidate for matrimony has been hanging around my house recently, making love to my youngest daughter with a mandolin and a trick mustache."

The two auditors laughed at the dry humor of this veteran of police business. Then the Commissioner said:

"I had my secretary look up the location of Murdock's country place yesterday; to-day I had my chauffeur look up the quickest routes that lead to it. I'm not going to send a good police officer into unnecessary danger. I've got a car with four picked headquarters men waiting right now downstairs, including my own driver. Inspector Montrose, Murdock is really your meat since you first spotted him. I'm going to ask you and Inspector Raynor to accompany me and the other four down to the Murdock country home. I only want Warren to have a little start. He'll take a taxi because there's no train at this time of night. We'll be right behind him to back him up."

They would have been but for two unforeseen events.

One was that a tire blew out most inopportunely; the other was a mildewed sign-board at the fork in the road after leaving the Long Island boulevard leading to Murdock's home. Despite the spot-light's gleam, the car took a wrong turn and was nearly five miles beyond this point of dividing roads before the error was noticed.

They promptly retrieved it, started back and were again at the same turn, when the distant sound of gunfire broke the silence of the night. The chauffeur sent the car spinning down the recovered road at top speed.

CHAPTER LIV

"YOU'RE STILL MY PRISONER!"

THAT native interior sense, the quick apprehension of the radiant quality of things, scent or smell, which is the most delicate and transitory of all the five senses of humanity, in Patrol made that formidable canine as much of a real cop in the next dramatic instants as his master. Bounding in strides that outpaced Warren's three to one, he came behind the two waiting assassins while they were taut of nerve and engrossed wholly on their approaching quarry.

Patrol had wisdom. He stood crouching against the ground behind them, before he catapulted upon the nearest astonished crook with battering-ram force from behind. Patrol did not growl nor bark. He saved his breath. The fellow went down, his pistol flew from his hand, and Patrol leaped for it, seizing it from the earth as the second thug stepped sidewise from his place of concealment to fire at Roger Warren.

Patrol had no time to leap high. Instead, he leaped low, clearing the space between the first prostrate man and the second erect one, landing between the legs of the one who was in the act of pulling trigger, still holding the captured pistol in his teeth.

The shot which followed might as well have been aimed at the man in the moon so far as accuracy was concerned. It went skyward and the second man went sprawling. Roger Warren leaped at the second man, kicked his pistol out of his hand, and handcuffed the two together in almost less time than it takes to narrate the fact.

Securing both weapons he drove the two thugs on the run down toward the pier from which the craven Gregory had disappeared the instant he perceived some dim shadow detach itself from the deeper shadow of the house.

The roar of the pistols impelled Gregory to cry out a command to the thug at the wheel of the craft. The engines had been warmed up and stopped. Gregory frantically disengaged the wharf-lines fore and aft, while the third thug started the motor.

All of this took time. Yet Roger could not reach the end of the pier with his two captives before the boat was under way. Patrol had no such handicap. His astonishing speed, his anger at Gregory for the mean trick of filling his eyes and hair full of some soft black stuff, his native knowledge that Gregory was wrong, his added fury at the effort he had just thwarted to kill his master—all these made him a demon-dog in very truth.

He was at the end of the pier when Gregory first saw him. A horrid qualm filled the soul of the junior partner as the boat gathered speed and swung out. He whipped out Murdock's pistol and fired three times at the ghost of the animal which he believed he had already killed long before.

Gregory's intentions were sincere. Inspector Montrose, however, had found a very practical vent for his always dormant sense of humor in re-loading that identical weapon carrying a silencer, as told, with imitation cartridges. Hence the frantic coward in the boat's stern only succeeded in laying down a temporary smudge between the craft and the pier's end where Patrol paused, and the thug who now had the wheel steered for the *Clothos,* whose crew had been awakened by the shot on land.

Audrey ran to the cabin door and stepped on deck just as Warren raised his pistol to shoot. She was in a direct line with the chap steering and if the detective fired, he might hit her instead of the man at the helm, for the boat was rising and falling on the slight waves of Long Island Sound.

Patrol again took the initiative. He gave a tremendous bound and the splash of his great body sent up a shower of spray. He began swimming toward the craft, although hopelessly at a disadvantage.

At this instant, Gregory came between the figure of Audrey, who was standing as if petrified at the cabin stairs and as Gregory's body interposed itself, Roger Warren's pistol barked an echo to the furious bay of his four-footed aid in the water.

The chap at the wheel fell sidewise. He tried to release his hold on the steering wheel, but only succeeded in turning it enough to compel the boat to describe a large circle back toward the end of the pier it had just left. Gregory was again aiming at the invulnerable dog. Patrol had no more fear of plumbago bullets and came steadily nearer, while his would-be killer had no idea that the craft was winging back to where Roger Warren, with three pistols instead of one, was biding his time for

enough more shots to settle the account between them.

Whizz! Whizz!

"Jump!" grated Warren to the two handcuffed and disarmed thugs as the motor boat swung in toward the wharf. "If you miss that boat, I'll shoot you both in the water. Catch her amidships."

They did. Patrol went on board from the water near the prow unaided and Roger Warren leaped nimbly into the stern.

"Come here, Gregory! Drop that gun!"

Gregory did. Patrol darted forward and picked it up, bringing it to his master.

"Take that wheel!" commanded the detective. "Signal that boat that's being lowered from the Murdock yacht that everything is all right, or you'll be shaking hands with Nitrate Ned Marks and Mike the Maggot.

Gregory made all haste to comply with the instructions.

A raucous auto siren sounded just beyond the Murdock house.

"Oh, Roger!" Audrey Murdock's cry of ecstasy brought no responsive smile for her lover's lips.

"Go into the cabin, please and stay there," he sternly directed. "If there is any more gun-fire, lie down on the floor. Remember, you're still my prisoner and I'm responsible to the police department of Greater New York until you are formally discharged. Watch this man, Patrol."

Patrol did. He plucked another big pistol from the prone man's hip-pocket and brought it to his master.

"Steer for the Hell-gate Bridge," directed Roger Warren to the shivering Gregory, "or you'll go through the front gate of the real place it's named after. Keep in the middle of the river and don't stop for anything unless I tell you."

The signal from the arriving automobile containing the Commissioner of Police, Inspectors Montrose and Raynor, and the other officers, Warren mistook for the arrival of reinforcements for the vultures—perhaps!

The speeding machine was cloaked by the venerable trees studding the Murdock estate. Warren could not see its lights or he would have put back to shore. Knowing that Cobden was still playing the butler rôle in the house and not knowing how many other masked villains might still be in or around the place—to say nothing of those he believed to be perhaps arriving in the automobile—Warren took the only course open to him with his five prisoners, including Audrey Murdock.

He was starting for Police Headquarters in the commandeered motor boat with all of them.

Long Island Sound debouches into the East River just above the splendid span of Hell-Gate Bridge. East River flows past the eastern side of Manhattan Island. It is paralleled by East Street on the shore for a considerable distance.

Broome Street begins at No. 13 on East Street and runs westerly across Manhattan, as far as Hudson Street, where it ends.

Centre Street runs very nearly north and south. It intersects Broom Street at No. 403 of that thoroughfare. Here stands Police Headquarters for all of Greater New York in the gold-domed building. By landing on East Street at some wharf at or near Broome Street, therefore, Roger Warren would have his prisoners near the place where he would have taken them in any event had he gone by land.

Plenty of aid would be at hand when he reached this point for private pier watchmen and uniformed and plain clothes detectives are always on post in this section, day or night.

CHAPTER LV

"WARREN! O. K.!"

WITH drawn weapons the seven police officers leaped from the automobile at the Murdock mansion. The light still flowed from the living room. They hurried there first.

Then the Commissioner directed three of the men to go to the pier. Only the fan-like, far-flung streaks of foam from the speeding motor boat were visible that and the crowded rail of the *Clothos,* still at anchor—whose captain and crew had no idea what all this signified, owing to Roger Warren's skillful seizing of one real and one unreal horn of what he thought were twin dilemmas.

They hurried back to the house to report and were told to search the garage and outbuildings. The three high ranking officials and the Commissioner's chauffeur stood mute in the lighted room.

Murdock's livid face, staring eyes, the empty brandy bottles, and the memorandum still clutched in his stiffening fingers—these told the story, in part. The Commissioner stepped to the telephone as Inspector Montrose stooped to detach the paper.

"Police Headquarters, Manhattan!" said the Commissioner.

"The Commissioner of Police is speaking from the country residence of James Murdock on the north shore or Long Island. Notify all police craft in Long Island Sound or East River to search for and apprehend fast motor boat headed toward Hell-Gate when last seen. Notify them to also apprehend the yacht, *Clothos,* at anchor near here and arrest any and all persons found on her!"

"O. K., Mr. Commissioner," respectfully returned the man on the telephone switchboard. "Anything else?"

"I will return as soon as I can to Headquarters. Inspector Montrose and Acting Inspector Raynor are with me. Notify Deputy Commissioner Roxey to meet me at Headquarters."

He hung up and turned toward Montrose. That officer handed him the paper which Murdock had held. It was the secret formula for the compound whereby the man whose soul had now entered the Invisible had planned to bring temporary oblivion to the bullion guards.

"Don't that beat hell?" asked Montrose softly.

"The police department has beaten hell—with this!" said the head of the department, putting it in his pocket.

He looked down again at the face of the dead chief vulture. Came a shuffle of soft steps on the stairs. Cobden, clad in dressing gown flung over his pajamas and wearing slippers, was speedily descending. Before he could blink twice three pistols were covering him from the Commissioner's three aides.

"Come over here," directed the Commissioner. "Who are you?"

"I'm Cobden, Mr. Murdock's butler, sir. Is there anything wrong with the master?"

Inspector Montrose scrutinized the aged chap with his keen gaze. His face twisted into the wraith of a smile. He had lost one prisoner, but he had gained another.

"Butler?" echoed Montrose. "What kind of a job is that for the best scratcher since days of the Knox-Whiteman gang?[1] Mr. Commissioner, meet a gentle-

[1] AUTHOR'S NOTE—A gang of forgers and check raisers led by Alonzo Whiteman, formerly a State Senator of Minnesota, and whom last heard from, after a sentence of eight years and five months in Auburn Prison, a hopeless epileptic in an up-state county poorhouse.

man whom New Scotland Yard calls 'The Second Jim, the Penman.'"

"Yes, sir," said Cobden, with pardonable pride, as he extended his hands for the bracelets, "if I may say it myself, I'm rawther well-known."

He was. Nor was he a murderous thug. Like the dead Velvet Mary, the spurious butler was always known as a smooth worker in his chosen profession as a specialist of crime.

"Keep going!" directed Roger Warren sternly, as Harry Gregory shivered at the hoarse whistle of a police cutter, soon after their speedy craft had darted like a lightning bug under Hell-Gate Bridge. "Eat him alive, Patrol, if he so much as lets go that wheel."

With the words Roger Warren leaped to the roof of the cabin. The powerful searchlight of the oncoming police craft smote him full. He lifted his right hand. In his palm gleamed the shield of the police department of Greater New York. It flung back the mighty light with a radiant splendor all its own.

"Warren! Headquarters. O. K.!" he shouted. Then, cupping his hands as the other craft came abreast of his: "Up the Sound. Get the *Clothos!* Arrest everybody!"

"O. K., Warren," shouted the commander of the police boat, whose rail was crowded with harbor police, each gazing at the young detective and his queer cargo. Audrey was not in view being still in the cabin; but they dimly saw the terrorized face of Harry Gregory, with Patrol's slavering jaws menacing him, the thug bleeding on the deck aft near Gregory's feet, the two sullen scoundrels handcuffed on the forward part of the boat, as well as the confidential man from the office of the Commissioner of Police.

If Alexander, the Great, who wept because there were

no more worlds to conquer could work for one week as the head of the police department of New York, he would weep again—because he could not conquer and subdue all crime in one clean-up. When the incumbent of that job reached his office he found Roger Warren had all the prisoners except Audrey Murdock in cells downstairs. She was in the commissioner's private office.

Warren saluted, made his report quietly, and then imparted the news as to Audrey's whereabouts.

"Where's the dog?" asked the Commissioner.

"I asked one of the boys to take him downstairs and give him the hose, sir. Gregory was shooting Patrol full of lamp-black or some dark stuff. I didn't have time to examine it. What's the idea of a lamp-black gun, sir?"

"That was Inspector Montrose's idea. He has a queer sense of humor, you know. He and Raynor are bringing in Cobden the butler and Murdock's chauffeur and the other servants. I guess everything's O. K., Warren, except the girl. Her father's dead." He waited.

"She's still in my custody, sir. What is your pleasure?"

"Got anything on her?"

"No evidence of any wrong-doing, Mr. Commissioner."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure, sir. If I had any, I'd arraign her."

"Well," drawled his superior, as the first beams of the rising sun sprayed the room with their shifting amethyst, lavender, and crimson, "according to what Inspector Montrose told Acting Inspector Raynor and me, before we all left here to pack you up, she's a notorious thief. What have you to say to that?"

"Was that your automobile horn I heard?" asked Warren, astonished at the words. "Why I thought that was a lot more of the crooks. That's why I beat it. Well,

sir, if Inspector Montrose thinks that, then he'd better take her in charge."

"I'm very sorry, Warren," went on his superior. "Inspector Montrose convinced me, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that it's the fact. He's a close reasoner, one of the best minds in the police department and he proved what he said to me from his own experience."

Desolated beyond belief, fearing lest Audrey collapse if she heard the words of his superior, Roger Warren stood like a man turned to bronze. He looked straight ahead. He did not reply because he could not.

"Yes, the inspector not only convinced me that she was a thief, but that you also were," said the Commissioner of Police. "He proved to me, beyond all doubt, that Audrey Murdock had stolen your heart and that you had stolen hers. Is she guilty and are you?"

Roger Warren gulped. His eyes shone.

"We're both guilty, sir," said he, "but I tried to go straight."

"You did. O. K., Warren. Now go in and comfort her. Tell her that her father is safe. Tell her that no power of his crooked partners can ever react on him and that the police department will see that it does not. Break it to her gently. Then bring her to me. I've never seen her, you know."

When they emerged from the inner office, the Commissioner of Police rose from his chair to greet them.

At this instant, there was an eager whine and yelp at the door. It was opened and from outside by Patrol himself. He bounded in dripping with water and rushed into the center of the trio, shaking himself vigorously.

The Commissioner enjoyed the impromptu shower bath most of all.

Gregory got forty years. Brownie Joe got ten. The three murderers caught at Benny Smart's hangout were subsequently all executed in the states where their capital crimes had been committed. Velvet Mary Mallory received a Christian funeral in a little chapel. Interment was private and among those who mourned the girl's untimely fate were the high ranking police officials who thanked God that Roger Warren had been preserved for further departmental duty through her aid.

Benny Smart went insane. His maniacal "Ha! Ha!" still echoes through the corridors of a state institution.

Much of James Murdock's vast estate was swept away in the swoop of justice to recover the loot of years. The bonds put up with the surety corporation as the basis for fifty thousand dollars bail for Nitrate Ned Marks curved straight back to the bank which had been despoiled by Satchel Gusset and Yates.

Grove and Yates are serving sentences of thirty years each. The would-be assassins of Warren at Murdock's country house got twenty years apiece. Cobden was deported and is now in prison in England. Chatterton was freed, but so stigmatized that he had to leave New York for pastures new.

Legal proceedings were brought in the state from which Senator Sylvanus hailed to recover the bonds Murdock had "planted" with his boyhood chum after an examination of books and letters in Murdock's safe. This case never went to trial. Senator Sylvanus promptly realized the equities and this loot went back to help compensate victims of the vultures.

Coöperating with the New Jersey authorities, the police department of New York also retrieved a small sum from the tissue-paper corporation masquerading as a chemical company, which Cobden admitted was "wrong" and

proved by signing the name of "President Bosanquet" a dozen times in his headquarters cell before he was deported. The third thug who had been wounded by Warren on the motor boat was given five years, most of which he is spending in a prison hospital.

Mike LeMar's place was sold under the hammer. It helped swell the receipts of money disbursed to Murdock's former victims.

Nothing was found against the captain and crew of the *Clothos*. They were discharged by the yacht was sold and proceeds also distributed. So was the Fifth Avenue house, furnishings, and the automobiles and stolen paintings. The chauffeur for Murdock at the country estate was found to be on the level and promptly released.

President Molando of the silk company never had to pay for the Heir Apparent silk that Harry Gregory so kindly delivered to him after stealing it.

Cleaning up the whole involved affair took far more months than there were days in the time it took Roger Warren and other members of the department to clean up this dangerous and hitherto immune brood of vultures of the dark.

It was found that the country estate had been bequeathed to Audrey Murdock by her deceased mother years before. That, of course, was never touched.

Roger Warren was also given a handsome reward for the recovery of the Winthrop jewels. It was characteristic of him to turn it all over to the police department for the pension fund. He also begged that the department's annual medal for valor be given to "a worthier man."

After an interval of mourning for her father, whose real criminal character was always carefully concealed

from his daughter, Audrey and Roger were married. Roger is a lieutenant of police and still a detective as these lines are written.

A bouncing son holds out his tiny hands when daddy comes home from his always perilous tour of duty. Patrol insists on being his canine god-father. The four make a happy family, despite hazards of Warren's duty.

Yet something shields him. Perhaps it is love. Who knows?

All that the author of this narrative knows is that Roger and Audrey have found a kind of treasure that is more precious than any reposing in time-locked, massive vaults of mighty Manhattan's most opulent treasure chests.

Each day for them, when together, is as John Ruskin says, "a web made fair in the weaving by Athena's shuttle; an armor, forged in divine fire by Vulcanian force—a gold to be mined in the sun's red heart, where he sets over the Delphian cliffs * * * the three great Angels of Conduct, Toil, and Thought, still calling to them, and waiting at the posts of their house to lead them, with their wingéd power, and to guide them, with their unerring eyes, by the path which no fowl knoweth and which the vulture's eye hath not seen!"

THE END